

EDMUND BURKE

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PREFACE

To attempt to write a short life of Burke is a bold and even a rash undertaking, and it has, in fact, been very seldom attempted. But that there is room for something of the kind will probably be agreed. Lord Morley's well-known monograph (in Macmillan's 'English Men of Letters' Series, 1881), admirable as it is, and high as is the standard that it sets for any successor, is not of such a size or scope as to preclude other ventures into a field which is not easily exhausted, and which almost demands variety of treatment. While I have aimed at giving, as concisely as possible, the main facts of Burke's life and other necessary information, I have also tried to give the substance of his most important utterances so far as possible in his own words. Discussion, except where really necessary for the purpose of illustration, I have avoided, especially discussion of a kind that would tend to blur the picture of the man as he lived, spoke, and wrote in his own day.

As regards the larger biographies, upon which I have drawn freely, I have nothing to add to the estimate

of their value which is contained at the end of the excellent article on Burke in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. The earliest life by McCormick (1798), largely a party attack by a Foxite Whig, was answered very quickly by the much better work of Bissett (1798), which preserves some information and anecdotes of value. Prior's *Life* (1824, but subsequently enlarged) is not an inspiring work, and its judgements and its perspective naturally need revision now ; but it gives most of the facts and remains to this day the standard life. I have used the one-volume edition of 1854. Of Macknight's prolix and uncritical *Life and Times of Edmund Burke* (3 vols., 1858 and 1860) it is difficult to say more than that it contains a good deal of miscellaneous information, but that it does not add enough about Burke himself to supersede the more compact and business-like work of Prior. Neither of these works can in truth be said to be worthy of its subject, and should my own modest volume be the means of stirring up some more qualified person to write a better and a fuller one, part at least of its purpose will have been achieved. Much light, it should be added, has recently been thrown on Burke's earlier life and surroundings up to the time of his leaving Ireland by the researches of the late Mr. A. P. I. Samuels, a young historian whose death in action at Messines was an irreparable loss to students of Burke and of Irish history. Mr. Samuels' work was subsequently enlarged and edited by his father, the

Right Hon. A. W. Samuels, P.C., LL.D. (*Early Life and Correspondence of the Right Hon. Edmund Burke . . .*, Cambridge University Press, 1923).

The standard edition of Burke's works to which I refer is that in six volumes, published by Messrs. G. Bell and Sons, with two additional volumes containing the Warren Hastings speeches (the old 'Bohn' edition; some of these, it should be stated, are now out of print). Burke's correspondence is contained mainly, though not entirely, in (1) the edition by Fitzwilliam and Bourke, 4 vols., 1844; (2) the *Letters to French Laurence*, 1827; (3) *Burke and Windham Correspondence*, edited by Mr. J. P. Gilson for the Roxburghe Society, 1910; (4) Mr. Samuels' volume above mentioned. As regards Burke's speeches other than those which are to be found in his collected works, the most important of the summaries in the *Parliamentary History* are put together in the *Collected Speeches*, 4 vols., 1816. For the general reader, a useful volume of selections from Burke, including some of the best criticism on his work, has recently been edited by Mr. A. M. D. Hughes and published by the Clarendon Press.

• It was once said of a statesman that his life had been 'one vast Appropriation Clause', and any moderate-sized study of Burke must almost necessarily incur a similar censure. Apart from unconsidered trifles I have (I hope) acknowledged in the footnotes at any rate such of my appropriations as would not

be likely to escape immediate detection. Besides a general indebtedness to the biographers above mentioned, and to the usual historical works dealing with the period, I wish to acknowledge special obligations to Sir G. O. Trevelyan's classic *Early Life of Charles James Fox*, to Mr. Walter Sichel's *Life of Sheridan*, and to the Clarendon Press edition of Burke's *Selected Works*, edited by Mr. E. J. Payne. As regards such recent criticism as I have read, I have learned most from the pages which Professor Oliver Elton has devoted to Burke in his *Survey of English Literature, 1780-1830*; and my readers will, I am sure, be glad to find reminiscences here and there of Mr. Birrell's essay on Burke in *Obiter Dicta* (Second Series).

My best thanks are due to Professor W. Garmon Jones, of the University of Liverpool, and to Mr. F. O. Mann for valuable assistance.

B. N.

LIVERPOOL,

December 1926.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

	PAGE
EARLY LIFE TO ENTRY INTO PARLIAMENT—CON- DITIONS UNDER WHICH BURKE'S ORATORY WAS DEVELOPED. (1729-1765)	I

CHAPTER II

EARLY YEARS OF PUBLIC LIFE—THE ROCKINGHAM PARTY—BEGINNINGS OF AMERICAN CONFLICT. (1766-1770)	32
--	----

CHAPTER III

'THOUGHTS ON PRESENT DISCONTENTS'—BURKE IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS. (1770-1774)	61
---	----

CHAPTER IV

PURCHASE OF THE BEACONSFIELD ESTATE—BURKE AND JOHNSON	81
--	----

CHAPTER V

AMERICAN SPEECHES—ELECTION FOR BRISTOL— ECONOMICAL REFORM. (1774-1780)	95
---	----

CHAPTER VI

	PAGE
BRISTOL SPEECHES—SECOND ROCKINGHAM ADMINIS- TRATION—FALL OF COALITION GOVERNMENT— BURKE AND PITT. (1780-1784) . . .	121

CHAPTER VII

BURKE AND INDIA—THE EAST INDIA BILL AND THE NABOB OF ARCOT—BURKE AND WARREN HASTINGS. (1783-1788) . . .	141
---	-----

CHAPTER VIII

IMPEACHMENT OF WARREN HASTINGS. (1788) .	178
--	-----

CHAPTER IX

THE IMPEACHMENT CONTINUED—REGENCY BILL— BEGINNINGS OF FRENCH REVOLUTION. (1788- 1790) . . .	192
---	-----

CHAPTER X

‘ REFLECTIONS ON THE FRENCH REVOLUTION ’ (1790)	208
---	-----

CHAPTER XI

AFTER THE ‘ REFLECTIONS ’ —RUPTURE WITH FOX. (1791) . . .	228
--	-----

CHAPTER XII

BURKE’S LATER POSITION — ‘ APPEAL FROM THE NEW TO THE OLD WHIGS.’ (1791-1792) . . .	242
--	-----

CONTENTS

xiii

CHAPTER XIII

	PAGE
LATER LIFE IN LONDON AND BEACONSFIELD—BURKE AND IRELAND	257

CHAPTER XIV

BURKE AND THE WAR WITH FRANCE—CONCLUSION OF THE HASTINGS IMPEACHMENT. (1792-1795)	274
--	-----

CHAPTER XV

BURKE RETIRES FROM PARLIAMENT—DEATH OF HIS SON—‘LETTER TO A NOBLE LORD.’ (1794-1796)	301
---	-----

CHAPTER XVI

FINAL PHASE—LETTERS ON REGICIDE PEACE— DEATH. (1796-1797)	318
--	-----

INDEX	343
-----------------	-----

ERRATA

- Page 14, l. 23, *for* ' Gerald ' *read* ' Gerard '.
- „ 16, l. 32, *for* ' or with a ' *read* ' also his '.
- „ 175, l. 20, *for* ' he ' *read* ' we '.
- „ 340, l. 13, *for* ' is ' *read* ' as '.

CHAPTER I

EARLY LIFE TO ENTRY INTO PARLIAMENT—CONDITIONS
UNDER WHICH BURKE'S ORATORY WAS DEVELOPED

(1729-1765)

IN 1770, at a time when attacks on Burke were current in the newspapers, the *London Evening Post* published an account of his life, which begins as follows :

Edmund Burke is the son of Richard Burke, who was an attorney-at-law of middling circumstances but punctual honesty. Richard was a Protestant, originally from the Province of Munster in Ireland ; and married a wife from thence, whose name was *Nagle*. She was of a *Popish family* ; I cannot say whether she legally conformed to the Church of England, but she practised the duties of the *Romish religion* with a decent privacy.

Her husband was more concerned to promote his children's interest in the world than to trouble himself about controverted points of religion, and therefore brought his sons up in the profession of that which he thought the most public road to preferment, viz. the religion of the country, established by law. His three sons, *Garret*, *Edmund*, and *Richard*, were educated at *Ballitore School*, and there fitted for their several destinations in life. . . . Edmund was a lad of most promising genius, of an inquisitive and speculative cast of mind, which was improved in him by a constitutional indisposition, which prevented him from suffering by those avocations from study which are the consequence of puerile diversions. He read much while he was a boy, and accumulated a stock of learning of

great variety. . . . He made the reading of the *classics* his diversion rather than his business. He was particularly delighted with history and poetry, and whilst at school performed several exercises in the latter with a manly grace. The day after he left Ballitore he was admitted into the University of Dublin. Though the course of study which then obtained there was not at all adapted to his taste, yet he went through the College exercises with reputation and success ; and seems to have extracted from every science whatever was fine and useful in it, leaving the rest to mere scholars. . . .¹

This quaintly worded account had been written by Richard Shackleton, an old school-fellow and life-long friend of Burke's. After having been circulated privately, it found its way to the newspaper without the consent of its subject or its writer, and annoyed the former much. Burke proceeded to refute, in a delightfully characteristic letter, the allegation as to the 'middling circumstances' of the Dublin attorney, his father. As was his wont, he based his objection on some general considerations, but he was an Irishman, and there are, or were, no middle classes in Ireland. Just a hint of the optimistic light in which Captain Costigan and Mrs O'Dowd regarded the circumstance which surrounded their ancestry is visible in the remonstrance which he addressed to Shackleton :

Now you know that the upper part of this profession is very reputable, as any can be , the lower absolutely otherwise . The fact is that my father never did practice in the country, but always in the superior courts ; that he was for many years not only in the first *rank*, but the very first *man* of his profession in point of practice and credit—until, by giving way to a retired and splenetic humour, he did in a manner voluntarily contract his practice ; and yet, after

. ¹ The full article is given in Samuels' *Early Life*, etc., p. 402.

some heavy losses by the banks, and living creditably for near forty years (one time pretty expensively), laying out something on Dick's establishment and on my education in the Temple (a thousand pounds or thereabouts on me), he died worth very near six thousand pounds. This I mention, as poverty is the greatest imputation (very unjustly, I think) that is ever cast on that profession. . . .

Some further allusions to Burke's family affairs annoyed him still more.

Hitherto [he complained], much as I have been abused, my table and my bed were left sacred ; but since it has so unfortunately happened that my wife, a quiet woman confined to her family cares and affections, has been dragged into a newspaper, I own I feel a little hurt. . . .

We have now learned the main facts about a youth destined to become the only orator of our speech whose words have passed into literature, and to say more on the politics of his own time that is of permanent and universal application, and to say it better, than anyone else in English history. Burke was born on 12th January 1729 ;¹ of his childhood in Dublin, of his home on Arran Quay, we know, practically speaking, nothing. He was, in his childhood, a good deal with relations in the County Cork, and may be added to an illustrious roll of names associated with the region around the river Blackwater—Spenser at Kilkolman, Burke at Castletown Roche, Boyle at Lismore, Raleigh at Youghal, Berkeley at Cloyne. Of his school days we know little, though we know something of his school. The Richard Shackleton above mentioned succeeded his father, Burke's schoolmaster, in charge of the Quaker school at Ballitore, Co. Kildare,

¹ Not 1730 : see Samuels, *op cit.*, p. 5.

a village 'twenty-eight Irish miles from Dublin, a little off the high road from Dublin to Cork'. He had a daughter—Mary Leadbeater as she became after her marriage—who has left a volume of reminiscences of the school and village of Ballitore as they were after Burke's time, but while his school days were still well remembered. The *Leadbeater Papers*¹ comprise a pleasant chronicle of family life and local events extending over many years of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, its placid course violently broken by the horrors of 1798. The village must have been rather exceptional. A diligent, rational, and orderly Quaker community lived in peace and harmony with the Catholic peasantry, whose superstitions, so far at any rate as concerning fairies, banshees, the evil eye, and the unhappy fate attendant on children born on Whit Monday, they deplored, and whose industry they endeavoured to encourage. The school seems to have been no bad nursery of character; its founder, Burke's schoolmaster, was a man of character himself, and something, apparently, of a self-taught genius; 'a learned and good man, straightforward in all his dealings, and sincere in his converse with God and man'. The general impression left is of a large and rather turbulent family—we hear of obsolete pastimes such as robbing orchards and a 'barring out'—a family which felt itself an actual part of the village. The future champion of 'trampled Hindostan' displayed, we are told, great

¹ The *Leadbeater Papers*, 2 vols (London, 2nd edition, 1862), comprise Mary Leadbeater's reminiscences (1758–1826), some correspondence of the Shackleton family with, among others, Burke and Crabbe; and a complete list of entries at the school from 1726 to 1836.

indignation when one of the villagers was compelled to pull down his cabin by a surveyor of roads, and wanted to organise a party of his school-fellows to rebuild it. Judging by the reputation which the school acquired during a life of over a hundred years, the boys must have been well taught and well looked after according to the ideas of the time. Burke always remained attached to his old school and to the Shackletons, sending them copies of his works as they appeared, and revisiting the place several times.

On Burke's life at Trinity light has recently been cast by the researches of Mr. Samuels. He was, as might be expected, the ornament of a College debating society; started a College periodical; and, in all probability, came out as the defender of Charles Lucas, the would-be reformer of the Dublin Corporation.¹ His youthful writings show a marked political aptitude and a vigorous style, but there was as yet no indication that Burke's precocious abilities would later on be concentrated on politics. It was to be many years, in fact, before they became so; his interest in whatever he came across from time to time, and his omnivorous reading, were to form a process of self-education which was to last throughout the whole of his early manhood. To a reflective youth there was indeed much food for thought in mid-eighteenth-century Ireland, and it is evident that Burke was early impressed by some elements in a condition of affairs which is too well known to need more than allusion. Most of Ireland's religion, and an appreciable part of Ireland's commerce, lay at the mercy of a government ignorant alike of

¹ Samuels, *op. cit.*, chapters iv. and v.

the principles of religious toleration and of political economy The Penal Laws struck at the religion, the property, and the family life of Roman Catholics, and, though their application was in a manner mitigated by their very atrocity, some of them were always liable to be enforced. Wealthy Protestant ecclesiastical and civil establishments, the latter especially responsible, in one way and another, for a good deal of corruption, some great and civilising landlords, many wild and brutal squireens, a miserable and thriftless peasantry, such were the obvious features of the picture.

Dublin was an enlightened oasis in the midst of this state of society, but Burke quitted it early in 1750 to keep his law terms in the Middle Temple. England was henceforth to be his adopted country, and he was gratified by contrast with his first sight of it. In 1750 England was peaceful and prosperous; the Hanoverian dynasty was firmly established, Jacobitism being practically if not sentimentally a spent force; commerce was flourishing, manufactures progressing. Burke had an allowance from his father sufficient for his needs, and did just what he pleased, wandering from London whenever inclination and rather weak health prompted him. Now in London, now in some country place, he saw, talked to, and lived among all kinds of people: and, in one or two of his early letters, we get some pleasant glimpses into old-world country life. We hear of him at 'Turlaine' (apparently Turleigh), near Bradford-on-Avon, at Croydon, and at Monmouth, where his landlady, as doubtless did many other simple folk, dated all her misfortunes from the accession of the House of Hanover. Young men—Burke was with a

friend—without any apparent occupation except reading and writing naturally created the same sort of suspicion as Coleridge and Wordsworth created at Nether Stowey. At the mildest, they were put down as fortune-hunters, at the worst, as French or Spanish spies—in contrast, on one occasion, with a ‘little parson’ who was likewise a stranger, but since he ‘got drunk at night, got drunk in the morning and became intimate with everybody in the village’, was taken for granted. In London, Burke took part in whatever was going forward for a law-student, and must have met all kinds of people at Macklin’s debating society, some of them very odd people. This period of his life, apparently aimless, was in reality most fruitful. Precocious he was, as the evidence of his earliest writings shows, but it was not the artificial precocity which the younger Pitt and Fox owed to their equally unnatural if not equally unhealthy up-bringsings; unlike theirs, Burke’s genius was left to ripen naturally and slowly in the ways of ordinary life.

But there was all this time an elderly gentleman in Dublin who could hardly have been expected to have seen things in this light, and Mr. Burke, senior, was led to entertain some serious thoughts. It was evident that his son was making no progress in regular legal studies, and Mr. Burke, who could be, we are told, ‘unusually fractious’, reduced or cut off his son’s allowance. Burke did indeed acquire a good deal of law as he did of most other things, but he was never actually called to the bar. He had now perforce to ‘take to that resource of the sons of Adam who are otherwise foiled, viz. the pen’. Prospects in that direction, if not rosy, were not absolutely unhopeful in

the middle of the eighteenth century ; there were the beginnings of a reading public and a certain demand for works of general information. A contemporary authority, Sir John Hawkins in his *Life of Johnson*, cites cases to show that, if a man of the requisite aptitude kept from drink, as Johnson did, and worked with the greatest perseverance, as Johnson did not, it was just possible to make a livelihood out of literature, and Burke, as we may safely assume, picked up something in that way for some time.

But of what Burke was really about during these years we know hardly anything. In later life he seemed unwilling, for some reason, to speak of his early struggles. Perhaps the trait is not so unusual, and perhaps also the parrot-cry of 'Irish adventurer' which pursued him for many years made him avoid the subject. The rumours that cling round his life at this time, *e.g.* that he was an unsuccessful candidate for the Chair of Moral Philosophy at Glasgow, that he was the lover of his beautiful countrywoman Peg Woffington, are quite unsubstantiated. Of more interest is a rumour that he went to America. Years later Benjamin West, an American himself, could only account for the accurate and vivid detail with which Burke talked about some places in America on the supposition that he had actually seen them. But, as a student of Burke will realise, there is an alternative explanation.

Having no settled livelihood, nor any particular prospects, Burke decided to marry. The lady, by name Jane Nugent, was the daughter of a Bath physician whose acquaintance Burke had made in his professional capacity. Dr. Nugent, who subsequently came to London and has his niche of immortality in

Richard also would have fallen on evil days but for the assistance of Edmund, who obtained for him various jobs from time to time, including the Recordership of Bristol. Burke always had his brother about his house, and William came to anchor eventually beneath the same hospitable roof. To be closely associated with these gentlemen, to be known as 'one of the Burkes', did Edmund no good when he was launched on his own career. It is all the more to his credit that, starting public life as he did with nothing behind him, with startling examples of political venality flourishing before his eyes and with no particular encouragement from the example of his relations, he should have preserved his public as well as his private integrity unsullied from first to last. He had, throughout his life, numerous and bitter antagonists, who could find nothing worse to allege against him than some utterly unsubstantiated accusations of having been concerned in some of his brother's financial activities.

Burke's marriage had taken place some time in the winter of 1756-7; a child, a son of many and unrealised hopes, was born in due course. He had now perforce to concentrate his powers on regular writing for a livelihood, and obtained a permanent engagement to write for the newly founded *Annual Register*, an engagement which compelled him to keep abreast of current affairs. He also published various works which, if not very astonishing in themselves, were remarkable for a man still under thirty; he was indeed very well qualified for miscellaneous writing. He had knocked about the world a good deal, and had read widely in history, politics, and literature. As regards his reading, no very marked influences are traceable in

his present or future writings, except in one instance. The influence of Montesquieu, whose great work had recently been published and marks an epoch in the comparative study of institutions, he always acknowledged ; it is possible, indeed, that a study of the *Esprit des Lois* gave his mind its decisive turn. As regards classical influences, which counted for a great deal in those days, Burke was considerably more at home in Latin than Greek ; his rhetoric, indeed, so far as it was either, was Latin rather than Greek in type. His quotations from Latin poets and historians are numerous throughout his works, and he was seldom, we are told, without a 'ragged Delphian Virgil' at his elbow. His favourite English poet was evidently Milton, nor is this preference surprising. In politics and in religion Burke was indeed far enough removed from the Puritan poet. But he has a real, if distant, affinity with Milton, in the loftiness of conception and the sublimity of imagery to which he rose when deeply moved, in a style which is also, in its degree, reminiscent of large studies, and, as must be added, in the extent and the quality of the abuse which he heaped on his most famous antagonist.

The most considerable of these early works is the once well-known *Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756), which Burke had projected and partly written while still at college. It seems strange at first sight that a man whose dominant motive was to be a distrust of abstract reasoning in politics owed his early fame to a treatise of this kind ; in reality, however, Burke scarcely inquires into first principles at all ; he is much the same on aesthetics as on politics. Taking his stand on ordinary assumptions, he 'ranges and

methodises some of our leading passions' in the light of a mechanical sort of psychology. The book was not without its influence, but it would be out of place to deal here with a work which has no relation to Burke's subsequent life and has apparently lost all interest to students of the subject. Another essay of about the same date is of more significance as coming from one who was to be the greatest exponent in our language of the nature and needs of organised society. The *Vindication of Natural Society* is an exercise in irony, and concerns the writings of a man whom Johnson selected for the purpose of illustrating the first meaning of that term,—'Bolingbroke was a holy man'. Bolingbroke had lately died, and left some posthumous works of which the style at any rate—and Bolingbroke's style is the best thing about him—was supposed to defy imitation. Burke, however, proved that it could be most successfully imitated by himself. The tract is designed to show that the arguments which the late noble writer had directed against revealed religion might equally well or ill be directed against organised and civilised society. The antithesis between 'natural' and 'artificial' or 'civil' society was one from which Burke's thought never wholly shook itself free. It was one aspect of an idea, general at the time, that political society was the result of an actual 'contract' entered into between men and men or men and their rulers, a contract which put an end to a 'state of nature', a condition variously described. This little work, if it does not show much else, shows that Burke refused to be captivated by a figure that might have been expected to dazzle a young man. His aversion to Bolingbroke was instinctive and profound in days

before George III. had arisen to put into practice the ideal of a 'Patriot King' which he was to dedicate much of his earlier political life to combating. However, a reputation for writing *jeux d'esprit* is hardly a desideratum for a statesman. Years later, a man asked Johnson whether an indiscreet publication of his youth would do him harm, and was comforted by the reply, 'I do not think so, sir, though it might be mentioned at an election'. The man was very likely Burke.

Of more real interest than either of the above in the light of Burke's future development is a historical compilation which he undertook about the same time, covering the history of England down to the reign of John. An increasing interest in history, partly for political purposes, is noticeable at this period, and is evinced by the rival works of Hume (1754) and Smollett (1757). In this work, which deals more in disquisition than narrative, Burke scrutinises some party slogans of the times in the light of historical fact. Of such was the ancient 'Saxon constitution', held to be of a republican tendency by some, to which he dedicates a considerable section. More important is the writer's romantic feeling for the past, and his understanding of what his contemporaries called 'monkish enthusiasm'. The following passage sounds strangely coming from the time of Hume and Smollett:

The lamentable representation given by history of those barbarous times justifies the pictures in the old romances of the castles of giants and magicians. A great part of Europe was in the same deplorable condition. It was then that some gallant spirits, struck by a generous indignation at the tyranny of these miscreants, blessed solemnly by the bishop and followed by the prayers and vows of the people, sallied forth to vindicate the chastity of women and to

redress the wrongs of travellers and peaceable men. The adventurous humour inspired by the crusades heightened and extended this spirit, and thus the idea of knight-errantry was formed.¹

We seem to see already, in the light of after-knowledge, the panegyrist of Marie Antoinette.

Burke had gained a reputation by these works, but a means of livelihood from any other source than the necessarily precarious one of literature seemed as far off as ever. In 1759 we hear of him trying for the post of British Consul at Madrid. Dr. Markham, head master of Westminster, whom we shall meet again, wrote strongly on his behalf. Burke had, it appears, 'highly distinguished himself in literature, had paid particular attention to matters of trade, possessed most extensive knowledge along with extraordinary talents for business, and only wanted standing ground to do his country essential service'. The appointment in question was given to another, but, towards the end of the year, a wily politician marked down for his own the possessor of the above desirable qualities.

William Gerald Hamilton, better known as 'Single-Speech Hamilton', was a minor public man of a type which flourished with peculiar facility and abundance at a time when political gratitude was a reality. Entering public life at the beginning of the golden age of English parliamentary eloquence, he owed his reputation to a single speech which he had delivered four years before. His next effort in the House of Commons was not so successful, and being of a prudence which attained to the sublime, he appears

¹ *Works*, vi 350.

never to have opened his mouth in that assembly for the rest of the twenty years during which he sat in it. Horace Walpole retails a certain amount of malicious gossip about him, and it was certainly possible in an age which, to do it justice, pretended to no more political virtue than it had, for a politician to be more openly if not more eagerly out for what he could get than at subsequent periods. In consequence of his suddenly acquired reputation, Hamilton soon obtained an easy post at the Board of Trade, and was now able to secure Burke's services as a private secretary, or, as he put it, 'a companion of his studies'. Burke was to have a suitable salary for the time being and then a 'situation', *i.e.* a place under Government. The two men at first got on quite well together. Hamilton has been represented by some of Burke's biographers as a sort of monster of meanness and ingratitude, an estimate difficult to reconcile with the fact that Johnson had an esteem for him. He seems, indeed, to have been a rather self-seeking and a rather cold-blooded sort of man, anxious, as the sequel showed, to drive and to enforce a hard bargain, but he was evidently a pleasant enough companion and possessed of plenty of a lazy sort of ability. Being a useful man to know, he introduced Burke to a wider range of society than had hitherto been open to him. 'Young Mr. Burke', wrote Horace Walpole, 'has not worn off his authorism yet, thinks there is nothing so charming as writers, and to be one. He will know better one of these days.' He did.

Burke was, in the meanwhile, improving the acquaintance of a very different man from Horace Walpole. On Christmas Day 1758, at the table of-

David Garrick, Dr. Johnson, still unpensioned but at the height of his fame, found himself contradicted on the subject of India by a young Irishman whom he had not previously met. The acquaintance speedily ripened into a friendship which was to last as long as the life of the one and the memory of the other. Reserving Burke in Boswell for further consideration, we need only remark the wholesome influence which Johnson's piercing common sense and hatred of other people's sonorous commonplaces must have exerted on a young man who was developing political ambitions; nor is it hard to trace some utterances of the true Johnsonian ring woven into the tissue of Burke's rhetoric. It is evident also what a refreshing change the varied society which centred round Johnson must have afforded Burke when he became a busy public man. Johnson himself, though a keen enough partisan superficially, believed in his heart that one form of government was as good or as bad as another. This was, needless to say, not Burke's opinion. He was before long to feel public affairs exactly as most people feel private affairs, with an absorbing anxiety that was extraordinary in one who was never to be faced with the responsibility of making important decisions. Johnson, on the other hand, though he lived through the American War, stoutly protested that 'public affairs vex no man' and that nothing that happened in that field caused him 'to eat an ounce less meat'. Association with this circle must also have strengthened the conservative cast of Burke's mind, a conservatism by no means incompatible with political Whiggery, or, with a respect for Crown, Church, and existing institutions generally. Literature,

as Burke himself was to point out in his *Reflections on the French Revolution*, is frequently in opposition, but Johnson's club was essentially conservative in outlook. Tory or Whig, none of them had much turn for starting new ideas in literature, society, or politics, and were quite content with an order of things in which most of them occupied, or had come to occupy, a fairly prosperous place.

Burke himself, however, was far from having attained any such position, and was to remain for some years yet in bondage to his employer. Hamilton was appointed before long Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and Burke accompanied his patron to Dublin. Burke's position, though unofficial, brought him into constant contact with the rulers of the country, and he was now able to see his native land with the eyes no longer of a boy but of a statesman. Hamilton, as already remarked, was by no means destitute of ability as well as of eloquence, and was not afraid to risk his reputation for the last quality in the Irish as distinct from the English House of Commons. However, the first few years of George III.'s reign were very quiet years in Ireland, and not much of importance came Hamilton's way. The country was more active commercially than it had been in Burke's youth, but the general system remained; the Dublin Castle ascendancy was unaltered, as were the Penal Laws, and the huge civil establishment swollen with sinecure places and pensions. Burke regarded the Penal Laws as the root cause of Ireland's woes. He set himself to prepare a work on that subject, of which a fragment survives, when Hamilton ceased to be Chief Secretary,

not however before he had secured a lucrative sinecure for himself.

Burke had now perforce to return to London. Hamilton fulfilled his promise by procuring for him a tolerably good pension on the convenient Irish Establishment. But Burke had not enjoyed it more than a year or two before he and his patron fell out. Burke was evidently dissatisfied with his position. He felt constrained to point out to the indolent Hamilton that he now had a family to maintain, and that he must, for the sake of his own career, associate himself with 'men of more active exertions'.¹ His patron, however, appears to have considered that he had established a lasting claim upon Burke's services, and they parted, not as friends. Hamilton, with a singular optimism, wrote to Joseph Warton inquiring 'if in the circle of his acquaintance he knew of any man qualified like Mr. Burke' and explaining with the greatest politeness, and in a style which perished with the eighteenth century, 'that the variety of pursuits in which Mr. Burke is at present engaged makes it impossible for him to be with me either as constantly as I could wish, or as his friendship has inclined, or his leisure permitted for some years past'. Burke's account of the matter is somewhat different, and his command of the English language, and lack of command of his Irish temper, find beautiful expression in his correspondence, from which the following extract may be quoted :

¹ See Bissett (p. 68) Hamilton's letter (Feb 1765) to Joseph Warton, who had recommended Burke in the first place, is preserved in Wooll's *Life of Warton*, p 279.

MY DEAR MASON,

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The way in which you take up my affairs binds me to you in a manner I cannot express ; for, to tell you the truth, I never can (knowing as I do the principles upon which I always endeavour to act) submit to any sort of compromise of my character ; and I shall never therefore look upon those who, after hearing the whole story, do not think me perfectly in the right and do not consider Hamilton an infamous scoundrel, to be in the smallest degree my friends, or even to be persons for whom I am bound to have the slightest esteem, as fair and just estimators of the characters and conduct of men. . . . You cannot avoid remarking, my dear Mason, and I hope not without some indignation, the unparalleled singularity of my situation. Was ever a man before me expected to enter formal, direct and undisguised slavery ? . . . Not to value myself as a gentleman, a free man, a man of education, and one pretending to literature, is there any situation in life so bad or even so criminal, that can subject a man to the possibility of such an engagement ? You will excuse me for this heat

Burke threw up his pension, which, since it was apparently a *fait accompli*, a less scrupulous man might have retained. This fact should be remembered in considering his financial affairs.

The abilities which astonished everyone who was brought into the slightest contact with Burke were thus once more upon the market. ' Six years of my life ', he said bitterly, ' he (Hamilton) took me from every pursuit of literary reputation and the improvement of my fortune.' However, this period of suspense did not last long. While Burke had been occupied in studying politics, economics, and many other things, his relations had been playing the markets, and their activities appear to have brought them into contact

with various persons of importance. The mysterious William Burke, who had also made himself useful in other ways, was able to engineer for Edmund an introduction to a great Whig peer, the Marquis of Rockingham. Rockingham had just become the head of a new government, and speedily appointed Burke to be his private secretary.

Burke was launched at last. The circle of his friends who gathered round Johnson considered that, now that he had his chance, he might do anything. It is certainly true that, to say nothing of his abilities, the kind of acquirements which Burke was to bring to Parliament would be none too common now, and were, in all probability, absolutely unprecedented then. Various avenues which now exist for a poor but able man to get into the House of Commons had not then been opened up, not to mention that Parliamentary representation was the monopoly of a class. For example, Burke had done some miscellaneous writing and journalism, but journalism, though it no longer led to the pillory, certainly did not lead to the House of Commons. The law was then the only as it is still one of the readiest paths to a political career for a man with his own way to make in the world, but we may be thankful that Burke had not chosen a calling which would have gone far to sterilise his genius. Burke seriously and deliberately, and after a prolonged period of direct or indirect self-preparation, adopted politics as a profession, and it was an uncommon choice for a man of his sort. A better education for a philosophic statesman than he had undergone it would be hard to imagine; and it was an extraordinary thing indeed in an age that tolerated a man like Dashwood as Chan-

cellor of the Exchequer. But it was not so well adapted to the rough and tumble of practical politics, and, as there are indications to show, observers with more first-hand experience than Johnson and his circle were not so confident as to the probability of Burke's practical success. And thirty-seven years was a late age at which to enter the House of Commons.

However, all observers probably predicted that Burke's advent would at least astonish that assembly, as indeed it did. It was as an orator that he made his first dazzling impression; it was as an orator chiefly that he was to adorn and fatigue the House of Commons for nearly thirty years, and, as such, to leave certain speeches which, by common consent, form part of our literary heritage. However, Burke is still only on the threshold of Parliament. Before he crosses it, it will be well to recall some of the circumstances, familiar as they are, in which his eloquence was to be developed, and some of the reasons why eloquence mattered far more then than it does now, or is ever likely to do again. The esteem which the ablest men of that age attached to the oratorical art seems to us beyond all reason. The younger Pitt said that he would sooner have recovered Bolingbroke's speeches than all the perished masterpieces of antiquity, and some language of Chesterfield's on the same subject is even more wildly extravagant. A single speech, as we have seen in the case of Burke's first patron, could make a big reputation, and could lead to very tangible rewards. The demand created the supply, and oratory became a highly cultivated art. Bolingbroke, Pulteney, Carteret before Burke's time; during his own Parliamentary life the elder Pitt, Charles Townshend, Fox, the

younger Pitt, Sheridan, and, in the Irish Parliament, Grattan and Flood, were all, with whatever differences of individual style, conscious exponents of a great tradition.

Some of the speeches delivered by the later eighteenth-century orators have survived more or less in full ; if we look into any of them, or even if we turn over the summaries contained in the *Parliamentary History*, we are struck by an immense change in the atmosphere between then and now. The external framework of Parliament remains ; public business is still conducted in a fashion not dissimilar ; debates are still audible in the House of Lords and the House of Commons ; but no one speaks now as did the greatest of those orators. To put the strongest reason first, a public man of to-day would probably admit that there is hardly anyone now living who could do so if he tried ; in sheer eloquence these men were amazing. He would, however, probably add that their speeches were liable to betray certain characteristics which a modern parliamentary speaker would have no desire to emulate. It is not so much the insistent manner in which these orators deal in hoary commonplaces, and appeal to obvious principles and obvious emotions ; any orator must do these things ; and we can also allow for the rotundity of phrase which was characteristic of the age. It is rather that they often display a pomposity, a magniloquence, a tendency to lay their hands on their hearts and to invoke the Deity and the genius of the British Constitution in witness to the rectitude of their intentions, which strikes our more chastened taste as a good deal nearer the ridiculous than the sublime ; the prodigious reception accorded to Sheridan's oratory is very significant of the standards

of the time. It is likely enough that the example of Chatham, who was great enough to carry off anything, encouraged a theatrical mode of speaking in some who were and in many who were not to the manner born. Burke himself, partly from nationality, and partly from the fashion of the time, often indulged this vein, but also with a difference. Another more or less general characteristic of these orations strikes us also,—their length; the speeches delivered during the impeachment of Warren Hastings, which were reported verbatim and have been printed in their appalling entirety, must be seen to be believed; though it is certainly true that they were not ordinary parliamentary speeches. However, we have an example nearer our own time. In the achievement of sheer verbal mileage, as in other and higher qualities, Gladstone had probably little to learn from any eighteenth-century orator, and this last representative of a great tradition is well remembered to-day.

The change is due, of course, to the change in the character of the House of Commons itself. The House which Burke addressed was, as compared with our own, an aristocratic debating club, socially homogeneous, with no one but itself to think of, and with comparatively little to do. To its composition and general character there is no need to do more than allude; the major part of its members returned by the influence of the Crown, of the great landowners, or of themselves; Cornwall with very nearly as many members as the whole of Scotland; division lists very seldom published and, during Burke's earlier years, debates unreported; members more or less independent of constituents who, outside the big towns, did not care.

how their representatives voted ; attention focussed a great deal on the tactics of George III., who exercised so far as he could the right of choosing his ministers ; party divisions which, during Burke's first twenty years of political life, were vague and fluctuating, and did not become comparatively clear cut until the time of the younger Pitt. Burke himself once told his long-suffering constituents at Bristol that Parliament was not ' a congress of ambassadors from different and hostile interests ', but the ' connections ' of the great borough owners, the phalanxes of members who rallied to the standards of their respective chieftains to do battle on the appointed day, bore at least a superficial resemblance to hostile embassies. The Bedfords, for example, the ' Bloomsbury gang ', could always be had by anyone willing to pay their price, even though, as was said, they could only be had ' in the lot '. But members of other ' connections ' did not invariably exhibit a mutual fidelity which is proverbially said to animate a humbler class of practitioner. The existence of these groups necessarily made for a political unsettlement which was not unfavourable to oratory. On the general question ; ' It is well worth while ', said Burke in 1776, ' for a man to take pains to speak well in Parliament. The House of Commons is a mixed body. It is by no means pure, but neither is it wholly corrupt, though there is a large proportion of corruption in it. There are many members who generally go with the Minister, but who will not go all lengths. There are many honest, well-meaning country gentlemen who are in Parliament only to keep up the consequence of their families, and upon most of these a good speech will have influence.' Oratory could, in

fact, occasionally change votes ; there was something to speak for. As to other influences and outlets, the Press, during Burke's earlier years, was regarded by Parliament as a suspicious if not a criminal institution ; to write pamphlets, which to some extent supplied the place of our quarterlies and monthlies, was only just ceasing to be beneath the dignity of a peer or a member of Parliament ; and many thought it unbecoming in Burke to publish some of his parliamentary speeches.

The House of Commons, again, was in every respect a less formal, a less regimented body than it is to-day. Superficially, this appeared in various details of ordinary behaviour, Burke's occasional outbursts of individuality, though astonishing at times, were much less astonishing then than they would be now. Members would, for example, crack nuts, eat oranges, lie on the benches, and go up to the galleries to doze ; sleep, indeed, was, and for obvious reasons, openly indulged in. The head of the Government himself (North), on one occasion, when taxed by a dull speaker with being asleep, replied that he wished to heaven he was. The 'grand manner' was dropped quickly enough when its exponents became excited. The fact that an insult might be and often was followed by a challenge to mortal combat did nothing to mitigate a habit of rancorous invective in which Burke, especially in his later years, indulged as freely as anyone. More important, debates were necessarily freer at a time when parliamentary reporting was only in its infancy.¹ Party distinctions being less rigid,

¹ Lecky (iv. 273) remarks that Fox never realised the permanence which Parliamentary reporting gave to the spoken word, and the same must have applied to others.

individuality had more room ; private likings and dislikings counted for a great deal ; wit, charm, the personal attractiveness of North or of Fox went for more than they probably would now. With a pressure of business considerably less than it became later and immeasurably less than it is to-day, Burke was soon to find out that nothing, generally speaking, except his own and his hearers' powers of endurance prevented him from speaking as long and as often as he pleased ; in this respect the House resembled Johnson's ideal club, where a man could ' have his talk out '. No doubt there were ' honest well-meaning country gentlemen ' who were listened to simply because they had something to say, said it, and sat down. However, Englishmen seem to have abated at that time something of the suspicion of eloquence with which they have often, but perhaps incorrectly, been credited.

The orator, again, had a susceptible audience ; the emotional temperature was higher than now. Honourable members were not ashamed to display their feelings freely ; they wept on what seems to us insufficient provocation ; shedding tears in public did not, according to Mr. Walter Sichel,¹ go out until the opening of the nineteenth century. This trait was no doubt mainly a matter of pure fashion, though the fashion itself needs explanation. However, sentimentality and brutality—and the age was in many ways a brutal one—often go together. The great eighteenth-century novel and the great eighteenth-century play, to take the best known out of a host of other instances, both witness to a fashion which they

¹ *Life of Sheridan*, i 132

contributed to support. Tom Jones, who, though not brutal, was not exactly squeamish, preserved his 'sensibility' as well as his excellent principles intact through a career which included the startling episode of Lady Bellaston; Joseph Surface, again, like his creator, was a 'man of sentiment'. But, at a real parliamentary crisis, there was something more potent than sentiment to produce the highest state of excitement, and to invest debate with a measure of the ferocity of a former age. 'Depend upon it, sir,' said Johnson in the case of the unfortunate Dr. Dodd, 'when a man knows he is going to be hanged in a fortnight it concentrates his attention wonderfully.' Ministers were still liable to at any rate the threat of impeachment, an *ultima ratio* from which the Crown could not protect them; the Whigs really meant (for the moment) what they said about Lord North at the end of the American War; and Burke, in the Falkland Islands' affair of 1771, proclaimed that 'the lives of some concerned in this business must make atonement to this injured nation'.¹

No doubt the tirades in which honourable members indulged, on the glorious character of the British Constitution, on political consistency, and so forth, seem to us, if they mean anything at all, to be of the nature of sonorous platitudes or worse. This consideration does not apply so much to the big men. But knowing, as we do, the jobbery, place-hunting, and ratting in which the smaller fry, especially up to the time of the younger Pitt, were allowed to show themselves so expert, we are tempted to set down much of this sentiment as brazenly counterfeit. Part

¹ I owe this reference to Payne—*Selected Works*, 1. 267.

of it no doubt was, but we must not forget that the Whigs especially had some reason to be proud of the constitution of which the working was always being promoted by my honourable friend or endangered by the Noble Lord in the blue riband. In spite of the inequalities of the franchise and of all other anomalies, English institutions did really allow the people more say in the government of the country than those of the chief continental nations, even if that did not amount to much. Voltaire and Montesquieu had held them up to the admiration of Europe for their liberal character. An Englishman was undoubtedly a good deal freer to do and especially to say what he liked than a Frenchman or an Italian, and many members of Parliament, who had travelled abroad as part of their education, returned home with a lively consciousness of that fact. Moreover, the constitution as established had not long been free from danger. The dynasty which the Whigs had set on the throne of England had within recent memory been threatened by an invader from abroad.

A high-spirited aristocracy, believing implicitly in its natural right to control the affairs of the country, and combining a delightful intimacy of social intercourse within the charmed circle with a certain measure of exterior formality, tended, on occasions of importance, to speak in the 'grand manner'. The attributes of this manner were dignity, polish, and a conventional amplitude. It often issued in what seems to us an empty grandiosity; at its best, it issued in utterance which was noble both in style and matter. There was, as we have seen, time to expatiate, an important if not indispensable condition. Except,

again, for a few city aldermen and a few ex-colonial adventurers, all members spoke the same language, whatever their respective degrees of cultivation. Whether they affected intellect, art, the pleasures of the chase, the turf, the gaming table or the bottle, or, as sometimes happened, managed to do justice to each and all of these branches of activity; whether they aspired to be statesmen, or merely to subside into one of the sinecure places which were numerous until Burke himself did something to reduce them, they had all had the same type of education, for there was only one. Some of them kept up their classics all their lives; the poets were used to supply a quotation until long after this time, especially Horace, Virgil, and Lucan, the last-named being an especial favourite with Burke and the Whigs because of his declamations against 'tyranny'. The Greek and Roman orators, and, at least in one brilliant instance, the sermons of our standard divines,¹ were also sometimes studied for more practical purposes. Johnson was once asked—the question was not without significance then—whether Burke had modelled himself on Cicero. 'I do not believe it, sir,' he replied. 'Burke has great knowledge, great fluency of words, and great promptness of ideas, so as to speak with great illustration on any subject that comes before him. He does not speak like Cicero or like Demosthenes. He speaks as well as he can'—whether this means that Burke spoke after careful preparation, or that he spoke like himself and no one else, is not quite clear.

¹ Walpole, *Memoirs*, ed Barker, III. 73 n., of Charles Townshend Mr. Payne's notes to Burke's *Selected Works* illustrate how well Burke knew the seventeenth-century divines.

Not only the quantity, but also the quality of the business which came before the eighteenth-century Parliament allowed far more scope for oratorical display than is now possible. The statesmen of that age had a far easier task than their successors in a society which had not advanced more than half-way towards its modern complexity of development, and was relatively untouched by modern economic factors. The problems on which so much of contemporary political activity turns, being intellectual problems of the greatest difficulty, admit of no solution and not much illumination by rhetoric. Nor would it be easy in any case to be eloquent on the details of coal or electricity supply, though indeed, considering his exploits in the field of Indian finance, Burke could probably have managed it ; into the most complicated statistics, the most arid technical details, he would have imported all the lucidity of which they could possibly be susceptible, all the warmth of the living human interests which they represent. However, it is clear enough that the questions at issue in Burke's time were simpler and were generally intelligible. If some of the achievements of civilisation seem to be in danger to-day, it is from agencies far more subtle and complicated in their operation than any of which the eighteenth century was conscious or had need to be conscious. In those days the enemies of liberty and order were, by comparison, 'gross, open, palpable,' and were, from different points of view, a king, an oligarchy, or a mob ; issues were broader and were obvious, and so lent themselves more easily to rhetorical expression.

. Last, and most important of all, events themselves

provided, during large periods of Burke's parliamentary life, abundant and weighty subjects for debate. The condition was present which Tacitus noted long ago as necessary to oratory of the highest kind, viz. a disturbed condition of public affairs. Political, social, and economic tendencies were becoming apparent which, as they worked themselves out, were to shape modern England. In home politics, there were later on to emerge, out of a confused welter of party groups, clear divisions based on principles. Abroad, having acquired one empire, and having lost another, we showed ourselves, largely owing to Burke, alive at last to imperial responsibilities. The wars in which we were to be engaged were, as distinguished from the desultory continental campaigning which marked the middle years of the century, wars with intelligible purposes. Questions were to be agitated on various matters of home and foreign policy, on America, on India, on France, some of which, because they struck to the roots, are still with us under more complex forms. The stage was worthy of the actors, of the statesmanship of Pitt, the enthusiasm of Fox, and the inspired comment of Burke. Burke's life is intimately linked with events which aroused the highest hopes and the keenest fears, which threw the most searching light on character and capacity, and, in the passionate debates that they occasioned, evoked the deepest moral and political antagonisms.

CHAPTER II

EARLY YEARS OF PUBLIC LIFE—THE ROCKINGHAM PARTY— BEGINNINGS OF AMERICAN CONFLICT

(1766-1770)

GEORGE III. was in the heyday of his youth and un-constitutional vigour when, in July 1765, Burke became private secretary to the Marquis of Rockingham. What the young King lacked in experience he made up in will, and he came to the throne resolved to be a King indeed and above all parties except such as he found to his liking. Especially had he been determined from the outset to free himself from the great Whig peers whose yoke his grandfather, never happy out of Hanover, had been content to endure, and, by this time, he had advanced about half-way to the fulfilment of this purpose. One of the first consequences of the struggle between the King with his resources on one side, and one of the proudest of political aristocracies with their resources on the other side, was an almost unexampled instability of government. The succession question was now finally settled, and this had caused a general break up of political parties which was highly favourable to the King's designs. The groupings and re-groupings of the various 'connections', under the stress of events and

of the King's activities, render the earlier years of this reign and of Burke's parliamentary life among the most confusing in our history. It has been calculated that from May 1761 to July 1766 there were no less than 530 changes of personnel in ministerial offices and numerous smaller government posts.¹ Since the accession of George III. Pitt had been succeeded by Newcastle, Newcastle by Bute, and Bute by Grenville. But Grenville, who had at first seemed to be a minister after the King's own heart, before long became odious beyond measure to his sovereign; and, in June 1765, the King had, with heartfelt and unconcealed reluctance, to accept a ministry composed entirely of Whigs. However, through the offices of the Duke of Cumberland, it was arranged that the government should be of an eminently aristocratic character. Of such a government the Duke of Newcastle, a veteran survival of the Walpolean era, would have been the natural head, but reasons with which we are not here concerned forbade him that position. The leadership accordingly devolved upon Charles Watson Wentworth, second Marquis of Rockingham, in virtue of that nobleman's high lineage, broad acres, and great wealth. Rockingham had, when a boy of fifteen, shown his devotion to Whig principles by running away to join the Duke of Cumberland's army in 1745, and he never again did anything so spirited. His real passion was for the turf. Of his personal qualifications for political leadership, all and even more than all of which are detailed in the enormous epitaph which Burke was encouraged to inscribe on his monument at Wentworth Woodhouse, the most important was a power of recon-

¹ Prior, 92. *

ciling discordant followers, which any Whig leader of that time had very ample opportunity of displaying. But his health was never strong, and he had a very unusual defect in a man of his time and class, viz. an inability to speak in public. Among the remaining members of an exceedingly well-born ministry were, besides Newcastle, the Duke of Grafton, who was later to desert the Rockinghams and become the head of an ill-starred government, and the Duke of Richmond who, unlike most of the others, believed in a thorough measure of parliamentary and electoral reform, but combined democratic views for the rest of mankind with a pride in his own order which led him to tell Pitt, who had just become Chatham, that he would not be suffered to browbeat the peers of England. There were also Lord John Cavendish, whose name, as Burke would have said, speaks for itself, and Mr. Dowdeswell, a country gentleman of a good estate in Worcestershire and of considerable financial ability. But, what was a fatal weakness in the new government, the mighty and now impracticable Pitt stood aloof.

Burke had not become Rockingham's private secretary without difficulty. The story is well known of how the Duke of Newcastle besought the Marquis to be careful, for he had heard that this unknown Mr. Burke was a Papist in disguise, and even a Jesuit from St. Omer's, and how the high-spirited Irishman, after producing proof to the contrary, was for throwing up his post until he had received the amplest promises of confidence. The Duke's anxiety was not perhaps unnatural, and, as is important to note, he treated Burke with every consideration when once his doubts were set at rest. Exclusive as were these Whig

grandees, they were not illiberal, and, indeed, were mostly too intelligent to be anything of the kind. Unbounded in their confidence when once it had been given, they treated Burke well from first to last

The Whig cast of mind is perennial, but the name has fallen into desuetude and even contempt. At its most vigorous, and as exemplified by Burke, Whiggery was an active principle of conservative reform; at its feeblest, as embodied in the Duke of Portland, it represented that perfect balance of the judicial faculties which engenders a disinclination either to move or to stand still. In its caution, its rather arid common sense, and its dislike of anything thoroughgoing, the Whig type is a good deal more apt to be useful in practical life than to inspire any enthusiastic affection. In our own day Mr. H. G. Wells, in *War and the Future*, has dealt cruelly with an ancient and honourable term in its decadence. Mr. Wells's 'genteel Whig' is a chilly and fastidious creature, below the passions and above the needs of ordinary humanity, and acutely conscious of possessing a superior intelligence. In describing the real and vital Whig of history—and especially as he was at a time when party divisions were blurred—the difficulty is to isolate his special characteristics. A distrust of logic, a consequent tendency to compromise on political matters, and a disposition to rely on precedent, are English rather than distinctively Whig characteristics. However, the Whigs stood, broadly speaking, for a policy of more or less cautious reform. Their opposition to high Tory notions as to the prerogative of the Crown, their concern for the commercial interests of the country, their proprietary feelings for the constitutional settlement which they had

brought about in 1688, their political sympathy with dissenters, their utilitarian conception of the Established Church, are matters which need no more than an allusion. That, at this time, the Whigs, taken as a whole, comprised the most intelligent and the most progressive elements in the political life of the country is undoubted. But they had to live down a recent and not blameless past. In 1688, it seemed to many, they had stood for a principle. Since then, and before the accession of George III., they had had everything their own way. They had converted politics into a scramble for place and power as between a few great families, and government into a system of jobbery, corruption, and monopoly. In these circumstances the intervention of the Crown seemed to be needed, and the King was always able to count upon a good deal of public sympathy in his efforts at emancipation.

The King had behind him the Tory party proper, who had, however, little political influence. He was also enabled, owing to the confused state of political parties, to gather round himself a less defined and on the whole a less reputable band of supporters in both Houses of Parliament. The 'King's friends', as they were called, were prepared, in return for favours received, to support what practically amounted to a system of personal government by the King, under colour of a superiority to party, and an 'unbiassed attachment to the Crown'. As to the Whigs, they had split up into a congeries of competing interests held together, so far as they ever were held together, solely by the necessity of resisting George III. There were the Chatham Whigs—for Pitt was shortly to assume that title—hanging loosely to a leader formerly possessed of

a great power of popular appeal, disbelieving in party government, and desiring parliamentary reform. They derived their main support from the City of London, in which a commercial middle class was beginning to demand economy in administration and less restriction upon trade, and was foreshadowing a type of Whiggery of which Macaulay was to become a perfected representative. From the Chatham Whigs were drifting away the Grenvilles, an honest body of men who were powerful in the House of Commons. The Bedfords, who owed allegiance to a wealthy Duke, included a disreputable set of men of the Rigby and Sandwich type, who soon became assimilated to the 'King's friends'. The strength of the Rockinghams, the main body of the party, lay in the great landowners and in the House of Lords, which then counted less than two hundred members. They prided themselves on being the real and only depositories of the sacred traditions of 1688; on their aloofness alike from Chatham and his noisy followers in the City of London, and from the corrupt influence of the Bedfords; and they refused to entertain the idea of disturbing the balance of British institutions and incidentally of weakening their own influence by any real measure of parliamentary reform. A main item in their programme, and one which assumed especial prominence when Burke became their philosopher, was to keep the Crown in its place by means of an organised party and Cabinet system in the modern sense.

Such was the condition of things which Burke found on his entry into public life—a welter of party groups, across which events were introducing deeper

lines of cleavage than those caused by the factiousness of disappointed Dukes, or by the King's remarkable skill at angling in troubled waters. Democratic public opinion was becoming audible in the affair of Wilkes, and the American situation was also raising questions of the most serious import. Having taken up with his party, Burke stuck to it. How many times the public opinion of that day would have permitted a man in Burke's position to turn his coat the present biographer is not prepared to say. He certainly had more than one colourable opportunity of doing so, but he remained firm to a party which was certainly better than most of the various groups to which he could have attached himself. The Rockinghams' public conduct was as respectable as possible, and at a time when that meant something. They were removed from obvious temptations by obvious circumstances ; their leader was quite content that the King should be the King so long as he were the Marquis of Rockingham. It has been unkindly said of them that they went in for purity only because they would have been beaten by the King at a game in which their predecessors of the middle of the century had shown a remarkable proficiency. However, they did abstain from political corruption, and this abstention did not add in the least to their popularity among the electors of Eatanswill. They would never have countenanced the brutal policy by which some army officers and hundreds of humble government servants lost their commissions and their posts for voting against the peace of 1763, or the shady financial transactions which attended Lord North's loan of 1781. Nor were they less irreproachable in their

private lives. Except for the Duke of Grafton, whose manner of parading Miss Nancy Parsons was not long afterwards to scandalise an anything but censorious society, they reached an almost superhuman standard of virtue when compared with many of their enemies the 'King's friends',—with Lord Weymouth, for example, who was incessantly subject to bailiffs by day and to gambling losses by night; with Rigby, the Duke of Bedford's henchman, whose only good quality is stated to have been that he drank fair; or with Lord Sandwich, who was well known to be the boon companion of Wilkes in hours which the patriot did not dedicate to suffering on behalf of the British Constitution, but was not thereby prevented from becoming High Steward of the University of Cambridge.

Under this blameless exterior, the Rockingham leaders did not conceal a very great amount of brains or of energy, but they had now at their service a recruit with an unlimited supply of just those things with which they themselves could best afford to dispense. Burke lost no time in getting himself returned to Parliament for the borough of Wendover (January 1766), a borough in which Lord Verney, who was associated with the financial transactions of William Burke, had what was delicately termed an 'interest'. Nothing, Burke assures us, would have led the Rockinghams to accept office unless they had been urged thereto by a compelling sense of public duty. One seems to remember having heard protestations of this kind on other occasions; nor need we forget that the sweets of office were not merely a good deal sweeter than they have become in a more strenuous age, but offered many opportunities for the exercise.

of a generosity which was all the more pleasant for being vicarious. However, we may believe Burke this time, for the new government was faced with a situation of the greatest difficulty in America. It was to the question of America that Burke, who had already written a work on the subject,¹ was to devote his best powers during some of the best years of his life.

The old story of an arbitrary king and an unintelligent minister conspiring to encroach on the constitutional rights of a freedom-loving people is one to which currency was given by a generation of Whig historians, and to which Burke himself was a powerful if not exactly an intentional contributor. But, as is well known, it has fared badly at the hands of recent inquiry. It has had to give place to a less sensational account, an account of constitutional relations as between the colonies and the mother country that were utterly undefined, of a moderate attempt, not immoderately enforced, to define these relations, of its collision with a desire for self-government that had gradually and insensibly arisen. That the policy which originally provoked the conflict was neither illegal nor essentially unreasonable; that, whatever the Americans had on their side, it was not the law and custom of the English Constitution is now increasingly recognised by American as well as by English historians. This does not mean that the responsible English statesmen did not, during the progress of the quarrel, exhibit a vacillation ill-calculated to bring any policy to a successful issue,

¹ *An Account of the European Settlements in America* (1757), published anonymously and written possibly in conjunction with William Burke. It is reprinted in at least one American edition, but not in any English editions of Burke's works.

or that they would not have done well to have listened to the advice of the party of which Burke was the chief spokesman. If his weighty advocacy of the path of expediency rather than of law had been heeded, a separation, inevitable perhaps in the long run, would almost certainly have been delayed, and even a moderate delay of the greatest misfortune that has ever happened to England would have been something. Separation might then have been accomplished under circumstances that might have been better, and could not conceivably have been worse, with less perplexity, less bitterness, and less bloodshed.

The causes, as distinct from the occasions, of the great separation lay deep in the roots of character and environment, and have been illustrated by Burke in his best known speech. The puritan temper of the colonists was alien to that of an older civilisation, especially as represented by the fashionable noblemen who were often assigned them as governors. A rapidly growing population, not reinforced by much immigration, had largely forgotten England, and was conscious of the possession of vast and unexploited sources of wealth. The American patriots had read in Locke, to their great edification and satisfaction, that no government was legitimate unless it rested on the consent of the governed. They had also imbibed from European thinkers a doctrine of 'Natural Rights', to which they were eventually to have recourse from an untenable legal position.

After the conclusion of the war which drove the French from Canada and so removed a menace to the colonies from that quarter, it seemed to various English statesmen high time to regularise the extremely

anomalous state into which both the constitutional and the commercial relations between Great Britain and her colonies had drifted. On the executive side, the position of the governors, and the authority to whom they were responsible, raised difficulties, seeing that they were appointed by the Crown and paid by the colonial legislative assemblies. Questions of imperial defence had also arisen which called for settlement. A system by which the thirteen separate legislatures voted with more or less punctuality their respective shares of the funds necessary for their defence had not worked satisfactorily, and England now found herself saddled with a very heavy war debt. On the commercial side, eighteenth-century colonial policy aimed at concentrating trade within the Empire, and implied some doctrines which had to await the *Wealth of Nations* for their refutation. No one in theory disputed the right of the imperial government to 'regulate' the trade of the colonies to that end under the Acts of Trade and Navigation. Nor had the system worked entirely to the disadvantage of the Americans; however, regulations by which certain American commodities ('enumerated articles') were only allowed to be exported by way of English ports were the subject of some hardship and more evasion. So widespread had this evasion become, and so imperative was the need for revenue, that Grenville decided to introduce more stringent control by means of the usual machinery of admiralty courts and English revenue officers. He also decided—and this from the point of view of the American patriots was the thin edge of the wedge—to apply the proceeds of the customs duties, not 'only for the purposes of that

particular administration, but also for revenue, wherefrom to provide for the military as distinct from the naval defence of the colonies. Duties of this kind ('external taxation') were, according to an unfounded idea which was prevalent in the colonies, sharply distinguishable from 'internal taxation', but Grenville, after long and careful consideration and inquiry, thought it necessary to introduce also some direct internal taxation of a kind which had been mooted on previous occasions. The result was the Stamp Act—an assertion of Imperial supremacy in which there was nothing illegal. Its colonial opponents took their stand on the principle of 'No taxation without representation', a principle which, however venerable, was not reasonably applicable to the circumstances of this particular case. Though it afforded a perpetual source of eloquence to a vocal type of lawyer on the other side of the Atlantic, it could not have been expected to appeal to the vast majority of Englishmen, who were themselves taxed without anything that could be called parliamentary representation.

The outburst which the Stamp Act had aroused in America had not been foreseen. It is easy to say now that the Mercantile System was in reality out of date, and that objections which were ostensibly of a legal character were really the symptoms of a vigorous national feeling. This was seen only by a very few isolated and detached observers who had no influence. Of such was the Dean Tucker who had predicted the separation of the colonies as soon as the menace from France was removed, and upon whom Burke pours scorn in his *Conciliation* speech. Nor, except that the

merchants were petitioning for its repeal, was any particular importance attached to the American question by general English opinion. None the less, the colonies were in an uproar, and the Rockinghams had somehow to pull the chestnuts out of the fire. It was on the Stamp Act that Burke's voice was first heard in the House of Commons, in speeches which won applause from Pitt himself. Burke was, as were his party, thoroughly alive to the commercial interests of the country; to quarrel with America was, in view of the 'non-importation' agreements into which the Americans were entering, exceedingly bad business. The Rockinghams, though not unanimously, decided to repeal the Stamp Act. This was done amid the loud plaudits of business men, who did not, however, bulk so largely in the community then as now. But the path had been full of difficulties. In order to conciliate both the King and also some of their own followers, the Rockinghams decided to accompany the repeal by an Act (the much debated 'Declaratory' Act) which affirmed as a matter of principle, though without expressly mentioning the right of taxation, the supremacy of Parliament in all matters appertaining to the colonies. This expedient, though a sufficiently honest and well-meaning attempt to find a formula, was one which Burke's maturer judgement would probably have rejected; but on this occasion he approved what was something very like the affirmation of a general and inoperative principle in a very practical and contentious matter.¹ But the Rockinghams' posi-

¹ Bissett (p. 75) expressly affirms that Rockingham consulted Burke, whose advice was 'to choose a middle course between two opposite extremes of precipitating affairs with the colonists and sacrificing the dignity of the Crown'

tion was insecure. They had no particular popularity in the country ; they had no support from the then very important classes of country gentlemen and country clergy ; and Pitt was hostile. In these circumstances the King was able before long to fulfil his cherished project of getting rid of them. After just over a year of office they were forced to yield to a heterogeneous ministry composed of Pitt, about to become Chatham, and his nominal adherents. A ministry of this kind, besides its internal weakness, was the negation of a party system as advocated by the Rockinghams. An elegy on the first Rockingham administration was written by Burke in a style of commendable brevity.¹ Among other achievements, his party had repealed the Stamp Act, taken measures to promote trade with America, and had, they hoped, for ever abolished the practice of removing military officers for their votes in Parliament.

Burke was now free to 'choose other connections', and Rockingham advised him in his own interest to do so. So great was the impression that he had made on the House of Commons, that we may be sure the bidding would have been brisk. But he preferred to stick to the Rockinghams, with whom his position was very different from what it had been with a transient Chief Secretary for Ireland. Things were going well with him at this time, he had 'arrived', and he knew it. With a sanguine temperament, as he was before long to show in a matter that we shall have to discuss, a just estimate of his own abilities, and an insatiable appetite for work, he appears to have looked forward hopefully to the future. He had been advised by

¹ 'Short account of a late short Administration', *Works*, vol. 1 182, .

Dr. Markham to moderate his aspirations to securing a seat at the Board of Trade, an institution of which we shall hear more. Whatever was the extent of his ambitions about this time, there is no reason to think that he ever aspired to one of the highest offices ;¹ on the other hand, he would scarcely have been pleased if he could have known that his rôle was in fact to be almost entirely confined to 'speaking the words of eternal wisdom from the back benches'. However, for the present he is well settled, and on terms with the hereditary chiefs of his party which were all the more cordial for being conditioned on both sides by well-understood limits.

As actual politicians, and especially as politicians in opposition, the Rockinghams were, after their kind, willing to do anything but work. But they now had at their behest one of the most laborious men of genius who ever lived, one moreover who, in spite of the political doctrines which he was to expound, certainly cannot claim moderation as his shining virtue, and was to startle his employers by temperamental exuberancies that were quite foreign to their hereditary repose. Burke's relations with the head of his party are symbolised by a picture, now in the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge, which Reynolds left unfinished. In the foreground sits the Marquis, in robes and an attitude, and in the background Burke is seen busily engaged at a table. It was now to be Burke's task during some of the best years of his life to be the Rockinghams' general manager, to endeavour to keep

¹ The enormous letter, or draft of a letter, in *Corr* 1 276 sq (1771) on his general political conduct up to date is not the letter of an inordinately ambitious man.

them up to a standard of energy remotely approximating to his own, to compose their quarrels while they were living and their obituary notices when they were dead, to place their policy on a reasoned basis, and to expound it in the larger light of political philosophy. That this task involved him in any sacrifice of conviction there is no reason to suppose, nor would connection with any party have impaired the value of his thinking or of its literary expression. Before ever he joined the Rockinghams he had manifested Whig propensities, *e.g.* a dislike of Bolingbroke, and an acquaintance with the economics of trade which was to lead him to correspond with Adam Smith. He expressly states that, on the very important question of America, he was in previous agreement with his party.

Burke's natural and legitimate pride in the position which he had now attained is easily distinguishable from the elation of the ordinary *arriviste*. While he sympathised with the general standpoint of his political chiefs, his attitude towards their class was not, and could not have been, an uncritical attitude. He always declared that he had no theoretical prepossessions in favour of aristocratic government, which he called on one occasion 'an insolent and austere domination'. Himself of the middle class, he would naturally have preferred that, for governmental purposes, an aristocracy of birth should have been liberally qualified by an infusion of an aristocracy 'of talents and virtue'. Nor was he inclined to minimise the moral effect of the example set by some members of the class that he now served. He expressed himself as not surprised that their progeny should be puny and degenerate 'when

children are formed out of the rinsings of bottles'.¹ But, in practice, it was no doubt somewhat different. A man so impressionable as Burke could not but be affected by association with an aristocracy that was in the palmiest days of its power, its wealth and, perhaps, of its cultivation. The 'Revolution families' especially, the Cavendishs, the Bentincks, the Pelhams, and the rest, fired Burke's imagination. They were historic, they were constitutional, their branches spread wide over the land, and their roots struck deep into English soil. The Whig chiefs, on their side, obviously liked Burke, were faintly amused by him at times, found his energy rather trying, and his zeal on public questions almost unnatural. Nor, presumably, were they displeased to see him giving impressive utterance to sentiments as to their position which no doubt coincided with their own, but which they could not very well themselves express.

But we must return to the course of events. The ill-assorted Chatham ministry was, after a few months, deprived of its head, Chatham retiring into ill-health and seclusion and Grafton succeeding him. Chatham's retirement marks the beginning of the personal rule of George III., and the point also at which the government that he had left began to deserve the title of being the worst from which this country has ever suffered. Burke has, in his *American Taxation* speech, left us a kindly portrait of Charles Townshend, the fatal Chancellor of the Exchequer who made the most wonderful speeches and did as much as Grenville, and with infinitely less excuse, to hasten our loss of America. Townshend's policy was recommended by the same

¹ Bissett, p. 87.

plea of raising revenue as had begotten the Stamp Act, a plea which he should have resisted. He coerced one of the American provincial assemblies on a matter concerning the maintenance of troops and, more important, he reorganised and reinforced the colonial customs service, which was directly dependent on the home government. Nor was this all. In the Stamp Act discussions the Americans had made much of the distinction alleged to have existed between 'external' and 'internal' taxation. Townshend, with disastrous cleverness, said in effect that he would observe that distinction, and observe it by putting certain duties upon tea, painters' lead, and other commodities which the colonists were impelled to import from the home country, or to do without. There was no one to stop this reopening of wounds which were healing on the surface. Burke was powerless; Chatham was sick; and Townshend's duties were not repealed, so far as they ever were repealed, until infinite harm had been done.

Grafton meanwhile was trying to strengthen his ministry from various quarters. He had tried Rockingham, who refused to come into a heterogeneous government of this kind; he then took in the Bedfords, who were strongly in favour of American coercion. The government was, as we shall see, coming into violent collision with public opinion on some matters, and, in 1769, the letters of Junius—fathered on Burke¹ until he expressly denied the authorship—began their

¹ A curious print reproduced in Peter Burke's slight *Life of Burke* (1855) represents Junius as a curtain almost covering a picture, except for one corner which shows a hand holding the 'Sublime and Beautiful'. It is not altogether surprising that the letters should have been ascribed to Burke, whose characteristics were not yet so well known, and who had, by his *Vindication of Natural Society*, shown his ability at writing in disguise.

anonymous attacks on ministers. At length, in July of that year, Chatham suddenly recovered. The old lion stalked out of his lair, but he was past his prime, and no longer able to assert his natural sway. This unexpected return was viewed by Burke and his party group with consternation. The fiery veteran, while allowing their 'characters to be fair', entertained a low opinion of the Rockinghams, and jeered at their slogan of 'moderation'. They, on their side, agreed with Chatham on the essentials of the American question. Chatham, however, going further, held the untenable opinion that parliamentary taxation of the colonies was illegal in itself. But the Rockinghams suspected his power of democratic appeal, and differed from him on the vital question of whether government should be carried on by means of organised party. However, before long, the followers of the two leaders were more or less agreed in opposition to Grafton's government, which continued to drift aimlessly and helplessly along.

Disquieting as was the American situation to those who were capable of seeing its significance, the question was obviously highly controversial, and America was a long way off. There was, throughout the earlier years of Burke's parliamentary life, a burning question nearer home, of which the plain rights and wrongs seemed clear to many comprehensions outside the House of Commons, and with which Burke was to deal in his first important work. The name that was most frequently on the lips of our ancestors during these years was not America, but John Wilkes. Wilkes has his secure place not only in history but, in the matter of the apotheosis of George III., in literature.

‘ Then I presume those gentlemen with wings ’,
Said Wilkes, ‘ are cherubs, and that soul below
Looks much like George the Third, but to my mind
A good deal older—Bless me, is he blind ? ’

‘ He is what you behold him, and his doom
Depends upon his deeds,’ the Angel said.
‘ If you have aught to arraign in him, the tomb
Gives license to the humblest beggar’s head
To lift itself against the loftiest ’ ‘ Some ’,
Said Wilkes, ‘ don’t wait to see them laid in lead
For such a liberty—and I for one
Have told them what I thought beneath the sun ’

We need not recount in detail how it came about that the most sacred rights of electors, the very spirit of English constitutional freedom tabernacled for a time in the person of that singular apostle, who was to die, many years after the present time, in the odour of Toryism. It is written in every history book that the decisive moments of Wilkes’s earlier career were when he was arrested, under a warrant of doubtful legality, for a mild article against the King’s speech in the *North Briton*; when the government, instigated by, of all people, Lord Sandwich, expelled him from the House of Commons for an obscene as well as for a seditious libel, thus making his morals pay the penalty of his politics; and when, refusing to stand his trial on this indictment, he was outlawed. Burke had had some personal dealings with the patriot early in his career. Wilkes was at that time eating the bitter bread of exile. It is true that he was eating it in Paris; none the less he felt himself due to the politics of his native country, and pined for home. In the spring of 1766 he had arrived secretly in London, fraught with infinite potentialities of annoying the Rockingham ministers, who, if they hated anything as much as an arbitrary

King, hated a mob. The terms which the engaging blackguard proposed were high, but he had suffered much, viz. a free pardon, £5000 down, and a pension of £1500 a year on the Irish Establishment. Rockingham offered him £1000 a year to keep quiet, this sum to be paid out of the official salaries of the principal members of the government. This offer was far from satisfying Wilkes, who justly regarded it as 'clandestine, eleemosynary, and precarious, with the greatest emphasis on the last word';¹ in the end, however, he seems to have taken what he could get and returned to Paris. Rockingham himself would not see him at any price, but employed Burke and another in this negotiation, and the interview between Burke and Wilkes was one at which we would especially like to have been present.

In 1768 Wilkes re-emerged. He made a public return from outlawry this time, was elected for Middlesex, surrendered himself to the authorities, was promptly incarcerated, and was subsequently sentenced to twenty-two months' imprisonment. He was then returned twice for Middlesex, and rejected twice by the House of Commons. On the third occasion the House declared that a candidate thrust *ad hoc* into the constituency 'ought to have been elected', and that Wilkes was for ever incapable of being elected to that Parliament. Things were disturbed in the capital when Wilkes returned; the price of bread was high; strikes were prevalent, and, there being no police, and peaceful picketing not having been invented, these strikes were anything but peaceful. The manner in which Wilkes had been treated roused a popular spirit

¹ Bleackley's *Life of Wilkes*, p. 175

compounded, in unascertainable proportions, of love of horse-play, love of fair-play, and sound political instinct. Wilkes had set an important precedent in treating the King's speech as the act not of the King but of his ministers, and he had also stood for the principle that an Englishman's house should not be broken open and his papers ransacked on the authority of a blank warrant. The mobs who now bawled 'Wilkes and Liberty' witnessed to a further conviction that a Parliament which claimed freedom from hostile criticism, immunity from actions at law for its members, and a deciding voice as to who should or should not be admitted to its ranks, might be as despotic as any monarch, and that the combination of the two was an instant menace to civil liberty. It is not without significance that Burke's first parliamentary motion was occasioned by the anarchy and bloodshed which marked the opening of the second Parliament of George III. (May 1768). A vast crowd had collected round Wilkes's place of imprisonment in the fallacious hope of escorting him in triumph to the House of Commons, but had been met by the Riot Act and by fusillades. The King thanked the troops in unnecessarily warm terms, and Burke, who was not satisfied with the action of the authorities in the matter, protested. Nor was Wilkes, or rather what he stood for, championed merely by the forces of disorder during the years 1768-1770. His case had stirred up, all over the country, meetings and associations, demanding parliamentary reform; the Bill of Rights Society was founded; the City of London remonstrated most strongly with the King; Westminster and Middlesex followed suit; Junius was in action; the King was obstinate; Wilkes,

elected Alderman of the City while in prison, was on the eve of release ; and if a leader had been found to organise a good deal of temporary discontent, something might have happened. But Wilkes, as he subsequently informed the King, was never himself a Wilkite, and had also acquired by this time an acute appreciation of the merits of a quiet life. This thorn in the side of King and Parliament was subsequently allowed to take his seat in peace, and a source of unpopularity accordingly removed from what was in the strictest sense the King's government. Wilkes eventually obtained the desirable post of City Chamberlain, and, rescued from the attentions of statesmen and of duns, subsided into circumstances of political respectability and considerable personal comfort.

Burke had a great deal to say on the important constitutional question which turned on the action of the House of Commons in declaring that Wilkes was incapacitated from being elected to that Parliament. One speech in particular which he delivered on that topic shows that his relative avoidance of close reasoning on general principles arose from choice and by no means from necessity. Incapacitation, he argued, was a legislative act, the House of Commons was, however, incompetent to legislate independently of the other branches of the legislature. That it was a legislative and not a judicial act was evident from the fact that the power assumed by the House neither was nor could be judicial power according to known law. The properties of law were, first, that it should be known, secondly, that it should be not occasional but fixed. In the present case no one knew upon what ground the incapacitation of anyone might be voted ; it was not

therefore *known*. Nor, since it was to be exercised at discretion, was it *fixed*.¹

On the occasion of the motion in the House of Commons which declared that Luttrell and not Wilkes ought to have been returned for Middlesex, Burke had felt called upon to rebuke the pertness of a very young and brazen member who, for the first time, had taken a prominent part in debate. Burke had met this young member before. There was introduced to him, about the time when he first joined the Rockingham party, an Eton boy called Charles James Fox, who, after an interruption to his studies caused by a continental tour, had returned to set an example from which it took that school some years to recover. This youth had engaging manners, a figure which showed as yet no hint of future obesity, a swarthy complexion, and a Jewish cast of countenance, which last was deceptive in that the future relations of its owner to that people were to be prompted, not by any tie of blood, but by a motive even more compelling. Burke was always indulgent to young men of family, but the course of training which this particular young man had received at the hands of one whose notions of the parental relation were peculiar must have startled him, if he knew it. Fox had, when just twenty years of age, been presented with a seat in Parliament by his indulgent father, and, following the line of least resistance, had joined the ministerial side; at present, however, he was known mainly for the gorgeous manner in which he was enjoying the pleasures of the town. The days were yet far off when he was to become the leader of Burke's own party, the greatest

¹ Speech on Middlesex Election, *Works*, vi. 120. Also passages in *Thoughts on Present Discontents*. •

parliamentary debater who ever lived, and a statesman who, it may be claimed, anticipated, as Burke did not, the line on which future political development was to move. The most conspicuous of all his qualities was a charm which sprang from a genuine warmth of heart and an innate nobility of feeling, and was accompanied by a good nature so spontaneous that it scarcely seemed a virtue. It shone alike upon the just and the unjust; it won the hearts of men, women, children, and creditors, Macaulay, in the thirties of the succeeding century, said he had met those who could not talk for quarter of an hour about its owner without emotion. An undisciplined impulsiveness which, whatever may be thought of some of its manifestations, was never actuated by sordid motives, a love of letters which made him one of the best classical scholars of his day, a love of gaming which even on contemporary standards seemed excessive, were other traits in a personality which could hardly have existed in any other class or at any other time, and will always be fraught with the attraction of an irresistible picturesqueness.

Fox, still in his unregenerate days, and Burke were frequently to come into collision. One such occasion is, though not important in itself, interesting for its illustration of the manners and customs of the time. Burke had no desire to change the peculiar system of parliamentary representation which had facilitated his own entry into Parliament and which, as we shall see, he also supported from genuine considerations of principle. But he did desire a certain decency to be observed in its accompaniments, and the borough of New Shoreham went beyond any fair allowance on the occasion of a vacancy in its representation occurring

in 1770. One candidate for this honour—a ‘ Nabob ’ as the class was called—had made his money in the East Indies ; the other—of the species known as ‘ Caribbees ’—had made his money in the West Indies ; both came fully prepared to address the electors with the only form of argument to which they were disposed to listen. The Nabob polled eighty-seven and the Caribbee only thirty-seven votes ; none the less, the Caribbee was declared elected by the returning officer. The reasons were remarkable. There was, it appeared, a society at New Shoreham which had been started for promoting the shipbuilding industry, but had subsequently decided to devote itself to works of charity, and to call itself the Christian Club. This association displayed the principles of a Christian trades-unionism by a piece of collective bargaining with the Nabob, and the money, thirty-five pounds per vote, was not distributed until after the anti-bribery oath had been tendered and taken. The returning officer, who had quarrelled with the Christian Club, had his revenge, both as aforesaid, and also in the evidence which he gave before what, to do it justice, was a scandalised House. Burke gave stately utterance to his disapprobation ; Fox offered an unabashed opposition to the motion for an inquiry ; in the end, the members of the Christian Club were disfranchised.

Much more important were some other occasions about this time on which Burke was on the liberal and Fox on the obscurantist side ; occasions which illustrate the working of George III.’s system of government in home affairs. Junius had published an extremely outspoken letter to the King ; Parliament,

unable to get at the author, was able to get at the printers. Newspapers were now becoming important; the case raised some fundamental points as to the law of libel; and Burke supported the principle, which was henceforth adopted and definitely became law some years later, that the jury and not the judge should decide whether a particular publication was in fact libellous. In another instance, which touched Parliament very nearly, Burke stood forth as the champion of parliamentary reporting. Such reporting was then a breach of privilege, and a certain Colonel Onslow, a gentleman of short stature but great dignity, complained that a newspaper had not only misrepresented what he said, but had alluded to him as 'little cocking George'. The City of London became involved in the matter; 'that devil Wilkes', as George III. called him, was able to extend his Alderman's mantle over the printers; if the House of Commons had not displayed a wise caution this time in dealing with the hero of so many fights, and had not virtually yielded the main point at issue, another exciting situation might have arisen¹

The replacement of Grafton by North in 1770 marks the definite establishment of the King's rule through his ministers, which was to last for the next twelve years. George III. had, as we have seen, started with some great advantages on his side which he well knew how to use. The prerogatives which he sought to enforce were, though they have since been abated by a normal process of constitutional develop-

¹ These events, including the Wilkes business, are fully described in Sir G. O. Trevelyan's *Early Life of Charles James Fox*, a work to which many probably owe their first interest, not only in its hero, but in the period of history to which it relates.

ment, recognised by constitutional lawyers ; he was an adept in every art of political jobbery and manipulation , nor were the great Whig houses universally loved, in spite of the unconcealed opinion of Whig historians that they ought to have been. The real issue between the King and the Rockingham Whigs was indeed important enough ; the fact that party and Cabinet government was struggling for its existence, and that the Rockinghams were its pioneers, is the chief matter of permanent significance in what seems an interminable and purposeless process of political scene-shifting and wire-pulling. The question, which has since been decided, was then open ; nor had the history of parties up to date been such as to inspire everyone with confidence in this method of conducting government. A regular opposition, as we understand it, was still regarded by many as ' a blameworthy indulgence in the spirit of faction '.¹ Chatham had, as we have seen, no belief in party ; in his opinion, an ideal government would have been composed of men from all parties, grouped around the Crown on the basis of ' not men but measures '. However this policy might have worked under a ruler of great ability and wide sympathies, it was, as interpreted by George III., as far from being ideal as possible. No doubt the ' King's friends ' included some honest and independent men ; but the system was not one which the ablest men could stand. It was accordingly worked by men whom, with few exceptions, it is difficult on the most charitable estimate to rate higher than the scorn of Whig historians has rated them ;

¹ See Winstanley, *Lord Chatham and the Whig Opposition*, chapter 1. and *passim*.

and the corruption and inefficiency by which it was accompanied are written large in the history of the period. The Rockingham, Chatham, and Grenville Whigs continued, with more or generally less unanimity, an opposition which grew gradually feebler. Burke was meanwhile called upon to attempt to educate public opinion in the orthodox version of Whig principles, as we shall see in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

‘THOUGHTS ON PRESENT DISCONTENTS’—BURKE IN THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS

(1770-1774)

HITHERTO we have seen Burke engaged mainly in Parliament, delivering speeches which have survived, if at all, only in meagre abridgments. He now began his career as a writer of pamphlets by publishing two works of this kind in rapid succession,—*Observations on . . . the Present State of the Nation* (1769) and *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770). His activities as a pamphleteer were not to be formally resumed until 1790, although, indeed, such of his speeches as he revised and published were practically pamphlets, just as many, though not all, of his pamphlets were written speeches. The circumstances which elicited the above two works we have already seen. The King’s policy was temporarily unpopular; London was riotous, America disaffected, and our foreign policy, a matter upon which we cannot enlarge, seemed dubious. Both the *Observations* and the *Thoughts* were written to order, and Burke is never at his most characteristic when so engaged. However, they show him for the first time focussing his mind on a political situation, discussing it in the light of

general principles, and relating it to his conception of the nature and the proper working of the English Constitution. The general position underlying them calls for some comment.

Of all the study which Burke undertook in preparation for his chosen career, that which he devoted to the work of Montesquieu was, as we have already remarked, probably the most fruitful. The founder, as it may be claimed, of the comparative method in the study of politics and law, Montesquieu has been submerged under the modern results of the studies to which he gave the first impulse. The *Esprit des Lois*, in its brilliant generalisations based on an immense survey of actual institutions according to the writer's means of observation and study, in its insistence that institutions must be related to their origins in character and environment, introduced a new point of view and became one of the seminal books of the world. The famous chapter (xi. 6) in which Montesquieu instances the British Constitution as peculiarly adapted for the promotion of freedom by reason of the complete separation of the legislative, executive, and judicial powers, exercised a strong influence on English political thought. A French gentleman of family, he had visited England in the palmy days of Whiggery (1729-31) and had provided something like a rationale of the aristocratic Whig theory of the constitution. In his hatred of 'despotism', of violence of any kind, and in his aristocratic standpoint he was much of a Whig nobleman himself.¹

¹ See Faguet, Essay on Montesquieu in *Dix-huitième Siècle*, p. 175. Much of what he says of Montesquieu would also apply to Burke. The relation between Burke and Montesquieu seems never to have been worked out, and might afford matter for a thesis.

Burke was steeped in Montesquieu, to whom, in the *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*, he has dedicated one of his great panegyrics. Temperamentally, indeed, he had little enough affinity with the passionless, subtle, and somewhat sceptical French thinker, or, for that matter, with the sober and cautious spirit of the genuine Whig. Here, as elsewhere, we are struck by the dissimilarity between Burke's temperament and his intellectual convictions; interaction between a studiously moderate set of doctrines and a temperament that was anything but moderate was bound to produce strange results. However, the days were yet to come when he was to charge those doctrines with a content that far transcended them, to proclaim the political faith that was in him with a prophetic eloquence, and to enlarge his sympathies to take in the East as well as the West. For the present he is the philosopher of the Rockingham party, and it is hardly his most interesting or his most important aspect.

'Monarchy', says Walter Bagehot of a theory which he was combating, 'has, it is said, some faults, some bad tendencies, aristocracy others, democracy, again, others; but England has shown that a government can be constructed in which these evil tendencies exactly check, balance, and destroy one another—in which a good whole is constructed not simply in spite of, but by means of, the counteracting defects of the constituent parts.' It would be difficult to state more succinctly the theory of the constitution which prevailed during the latter part of the eighteenth and the earlier part of the nineteenth centuries, and which was substantially Burke's own.¹ It held the field until it was superseded

¹ See especially *Works*, III. 25, 110, and for Montesquieu, 113.

by that of Bagehot himself, who found in the existence and functions of the Cabinet, which had developed in the interim, the pivotal fact of the constitution.

Observations on the Present State of the Nation is a pamphlet which shows in the clearest light one of the numerous facets of Burke's mind, *i.e.* his mastery of the details of finance, but does not contain much that cannot be found elsewhere. Two of its arguments, *viz.* an exposure of the King's influence in working against ministers, and, connected therewith, a demand for the rehabilitation of genuine party government, are more fully expounded in *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*. This, though not now one of the most interesting, has always been reckoned among the more important of Burke's productions. Contemporary feuds and contemporary formulas no doubt yield, under Burke's scrutiny, their maximum amount of political instruction, but the intrigues of George III. and the counter-movement of the Whigs are not now of absorbing interest. Burke was also writing in harness, and the pamphlet, forcible, dignified, and of the greatest solidity of construction, has a rather pompous and oracular air due to the fact that its author was not really letting himself go.

'Pour la populace,' Burke says, 'ce n'est jamais par envie d'attaquer qu'elle se soulève mais par impatience de souffrir'—a sentiment which was to be later quoted against him. But to 'la populace,' however qualified to feel where the shoe pinches, he would allow no voice in the conduct of affairs. The elements¹ that constitute the natural strength of the Kingdom, and

¹ In 1796 (*Works*, v 190) Burke estimated the number of persons capable of forming political opinions at 400,000, out of a popula-

whose interposition he would invoke at a crisis, are ‘the great peers, the leading landed gentlemen, the opulent merchants and manufacturers, the substantial yeomanry.’

He states, indeed, that he would prefer almost any other form of government to that of an aristocracy, and deprecates the conception of Parliament as a senate instead of a truly representative assembly ; but, while repudiating the names, he comes very near the things. However, in spite of every anomaly, Gatton, Old Sarum, and the rest of them, the unreformed House of Commons did, in Burke’s invariable view, afford a better representation of the balance of classes and interests than could be expected from any more democratic mode of election, or from any more apparently equitable scheme of representation. The King, Lords, and Commons are regarded as the trustees of the people, and it is with the people that the whole scheme of government originates—a position which later on, when his attention was otherwise engaged, he appeared to modify. Neither Burke nor the Rockinghams were democratically minded ; nor had the latter any wish to see their influence diminished by electoral reform. Burke also gives his reasons against excluding ‘placemen’ from the House of Commons, and, in view of the exciting circumstances which then accompanied contested elections, against triennial parlia-

tion which was then about sixteen million for the United Kingdom. He appeared to consider that the proper method for the people, in the wider sense, to make their wishes known was by means of ‘petitions’ In connection with the Buckinghamshire petition for reform of 1780, he desiderated a thorough preparation of the matter of the petition by ‘open committees from a choice in which no class or description of men was to be excluded.’—*Works*, vi. 4.

ments. While averse to thorough-going changes, every possible improvement, Burke holds, ought to be made on the existing basis ; *e g.* members ought to be brought into closer relations with their constituents, and division lists published.

The permanently valuable element in the work, to which all the arguments are skilfully made to converge, lies at the end, viz. in the force with which the 'revival' of genuine party government is recommended as the necessary alternative to personal government by the King. The concluding pages of the *Thoughts* have become classical, and the rationale of party which they provide is perhaps Burke's most important positive contribution to English political philosophy.

Party is a body of men united for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed. For my part I find it impossible to conceive, that anyone believes in his own politics, or thinks them to be of any weight, who refuses to adopt the means of having them reduced into practice. It is the business of the speculative philosopher to mark the proper ends of government. It is the business of the politician, who is the philosopher in action, to find out proper means towards those ends, and to employ them with effect. Therefore every honourable connexion will avow it is their first purpose, to pursue every just method to put the men who hold their opinions into such a condition as may enable them to carry their common plans into execution, with all the power and authority of the state. As this power is attached to certain situations, it is their duty to contend for these situations. Without a proscription of others, they are bound to give to their own party the preference in all things ; and by no means, for private considerations, to accept any offers of power in which the whole body is not included ; nor to suffer themselves to be led, or to be controlled, or to be overbalanced, in office or in council, by those who contradict the very fundamental

principles on which their party is formed, and even those upon which every fair connexion must stand. Such a generous contention for power, on such manly and honourable maxims, will easily be distinguished from the mean and interested struggle for place and emolument. The very style of such persons will serve to discriminate them from those numberless impostors, who have deluded the ignorant with professions incompatible with human practice, and have afterwards incensed them by practices below the level of vulgar rectitude.¹

Such was the official Whig answer which Burke provided to Bolingbroke's *Patriot King*. The party system was, as we have seen, just emerging from an extremely fractious adolescence towards maturity when George III. threatened to put an end to it. Bolingbroke had denounced a condition of things under which politicians, actuated solely by acquisitive motives, grouped themselves into factions, and had so far considered a King above party. George III. was putting this idea into practice by packing Parliament, a proceeding which, retrograde as it was and badly as it worked, was only unpopular when it came into collision, as in the case of Wilkes, with certain principles which Englishmen have always held dear. Powerful in the realm of ideas as no doubt Burke's pamphlet was, it had no practical influence even on the Whig body as a whole. Burke must have been well aware that it was not the King, but their own incurable dissensions, which prevented the Whigs from combining into a party which should fulfil all the required conditions, and indeed, when something like an organised party system in the modern sense arose under the younger Pitt, it was no thanks to the Whigs. The opposition grew

¹ *Works*, i 375. •

weaker after about 1771; by 1773 it was at its nadir, and did not revive until the later phases of the American war. The King had fought the Whigs with the gloves off, and partly through their own fault, beaten them.

Early in 1773 Burke, for the first and only time in his life, undertook that course of foreign travel which was in those days held to be a necessary part of every gentleman's education. Wishing to settle his son in France for a time, he first thought of Blois, a place much recommended to travelling Englishmen of that age for the purity of its French, but finally decided on Auxerre, and placed young Richard under the superintendence of the bishop of that city. After a few days at Auxerre, which he spent mainly in the company of ecclesiastics, Burke betook himself to the Paris of Louis XV. and Madame du Barry. He saw the Dauphiness at Versailles, with sentiments of which he was later to inform the world, and he met also some noted leaders of Paris society. A British statesman of orthodox views now found himself for some weeks in a society which was absolutely free from the prejudices in which he had himself been brought up, and regarded everything in heaven and earth as an open question. Salons which had made a lion of Hume, and, according to Burke, had thereby turned the head of a Scottish philosopher, extended a ready welcome to their present visitor. Burke made an agreeable impression on Madame du Deffand and Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse. His eloquence, which does not seem to have been appreciably hindered by a French pronunciation stated to have been atrocious, was exerted in a direction opposite to that of Hume, and was said by the sarcastic

Horace Walpole to have made as many converts as St. Patrick's.

Burke had thus seen something of Paris towards the close of the *ancien régime*, and had seen at least enough of French provincial life to have acquired the following conviction, viz. :

‘In England we *cannot* work as hard as Frenchmen. Frequent relaxation is necessary to us. You are naturally more intense in your application. I did not know this part your national character till I went to France in 1773.’¹

We shall, however, be disappointed if we expect much more from the future author of the *Reflections on the French Revolution*. Burke does not appear to have seen much of France outside Paris and Auxerre. Nor has he left us any appreciation of the unique society which had then arrived at the height of its brilliance, and was so soon to pass away. He suspected, indeed, as he told the House of Commons afterwards, that the prevailing scepticism might have social bearings ; otherwise he noticed nothing more ominous than did many other contemporary travellers who saw merely a splendid metropolitan and a tranquil provincial society. Burke was a practical man, nor, until his prophetic faculty was quickened by apprehension, much given to speculating about the future.

The work, meanwhile, of opposing North's government continued to be carried on by the Rockinghams, who were soon to be brightened and rejuvenated by a recruit of dazzling quality. Fox had been, in the literal sense of the word, enjoying a political career which had landed him successively in a Junior Lordship

¹ *Works*, II. 557. On French Scepticism, see *Collected Speeches*, I. 163.

of the Admiralty and a Lordship of the Treasury before he was five-and-twenty, and had given him a reputation in debate that had made the ministerialists willing to go almost any length to retain him. The King, however, had always hated him, and Fox was soon to be ejected from the King's party under a cloud, or, to use a more appropriate metaphor, in an explosion. The last straw but one was provided by an occasion when the Duke of Cumberland, whose private life had long been a source of anxiety to his relatives, married. The Duke of Gloucester had secretly taken the same step, and the effect of these episodes was to cause the King to promote the passage through Parliament of the Royal Marriages Act. This Act, in its final form, made the consent of the sovereign necessary to the validity of marriages contracted by members of the Royal family under twenty-six years of age, after which they were enabled, except in the case of adverse resolution by both Houses of Parliament, to please themselves. The measure raised, as will be readily understood, questions of every sort and degree of contentiousness—constitutional, legal, religious, moral, and sentimental—and in the debates which ensued, ample justice was done to all its aspects. Burke spoke against it, as did Fox, who particularly distinguished himself in getting its original and severer provisions modified. The last straw was provided by the occasion on which the House of Commons, usurping the functions of a Court of Justice, caused Horne Tooke and his printers to be brought before them for a libel; Fox caused a defeat of the Government this time. 'Indeed,' wrote the King to Lord North, 'that young man has so thoroughly cast off

every principle of common honour and honesty that he must become as contemptible as he is odious.' Shrewd observers had long foreseen that Fox was destined to take an independent line; the populace, however, better informed as to the magnificence of Fox's debts than as to the trend of his opinions, surmised that his dismissal from the Treasury was due to his having robbed that institution.

Fox was now quit of the thoroughly second-rate body of men with whom he had hitherto been associated. A strong native disposition had triumphed over an education and an early experience which might have been expected to render him as corrupt and self-seeking a politician as any that ever existed. To his new party he brought a keen eye for the central fact of a case and the central weakness of an argument, a seductive and unstudied eloquence, the highest personal popularity, and, in the way of statesmanlike acquirements, not much else. He now became an independent pupil of Burke's, who, except for political economy which he would never learn, taught him much. The friendship between Burke and Fox was mainly, though not entirely, political; indeed, it could hardly have been otherwise. The ways of a middle-aged statesman who was at the same time a model family man and a country gentleman of moderate tastes were not those of a young man who never spoke better than when he had been at the gaming table all night, and who alternated between Brooks', Almacks, and a lodging which was, for obvious reasons, called the Jerusalem Chamber. Burke was far too big a man to be jealous. Well aware as he was of his own powers, he could see in Fox qualities in which he himself

was deficient. He really applied to his own case his opinion as expressed later in the *French Revolution*, viz. that the road to eminence and power from obscure position ought not to be made too easy, and, later on, was content to serve under a man who might almost have been his son.

What position did Burke actually occupy in Parliament during the first period of his parliamentary life; what did his fellow members think of him? It is time to ask this question, even though we cannot do much more than gloss the familiar answer supplied by Goldsmith.

Here lies our good Edmund, whose genius was such
 We scarcely can praise it or blame it too much,
 Who born for the universe, narrowed his mind,
 And to party gave up what was meant for mankind.
 Though fraught with all learning, yet straining his throat
 To persuade Tommy Townshend to lend him a vote;
 Who too deep for his hearers, still went on refining
 And thought of convincing, while they thought of dining
 Though equal to all things, for all things unfit;
 Too nice for a statesman, too proud for a wit;
 For a patriot too cool, for a drudge disobedient,
 And too fond of the right to pursue the expedient.
 In short, 'twas his fate, unemployed or in place, Sir,
 To eat mutton cold, and cut blocks with a razor.

'In lapidary inscriptions', says Johnson, 'a man is not upon oath', and we should not take this half-humorous epitaph literally. The reputation which Burke obviously acquired is quite inconsistent with the assumption that he was always wearying the House to the extent implied. Two of the three great published speeches which he delivered during the decade which we are now considering (1770-1780), viz. that on *American Taxation*, and on *Economical Reform*, were accorded a reception which would have made

the reputation of a lesser man, as were others, including one on the employment of Indians in the American war, which exist only in a summarised form. The astonishment which his earliest efforts created no doubt soon wore off, as did also the diffidence which would doubtless have attended a new member. Though he does not appear to have deliberately thrust himself into an undue prominence in these early years, he spoke often and long, and in a manner calculated to take by storm a citadel which generally prefers to yield to a slower mode of approach. He was perhaps slightly too conscious that he had owed his entry into Parliament to his own exertions, and the opportunity of lifting up his voice therein was not such a light matter to him as it was to those to whom it had come in the natural course. He spoke generally after careful preparation, in this differing from the far more popular Fox. Fox's great attraction lay in a naturalness and spontaneity which disdained elaborate preparation, and led Porson to say that 'he began in the middle of a sentence and trusted to the Almighty to get him out of it', on the ease and flexibility with which he returned upon and re-illustrated his thesis. Burke, of course, went too fast for his audience. He could dazzle, overwhelm, instruct;¹ but many members preferred to suffer in this way at the hands of someone more of their own kind than of a private secretary of Rockingham's, who was the son of no one knew

¹ Burke was never held to be a safe model for practical purposes—unless in the instance of his *Economical Reform* speech, which was much admired. Two speeches of Fox were generally recommended, viz. those on the *Westminster Scrutiny* (1784), and the *Russian Armament* (1792). The latter may be found in Nimmo's *Treasury of British Eloquence*. Its pulverising power is extraordinary.

who and came from no one knew where. Hazlitt says of a public man of his own day that Sir Francis Burdett 'could not have uttered what he often did if, besides his general respectability, he had not been a very honest, a very good-tempered, and a very good-looking man'. Burke was evidently a well-looking man, strongly built, it is said, and five feet ten inches in height. But, though we may certainly credit numerous assurances to the effect that the workings of intellect were traceable on his visage, he does not appear to have had any very marked distinction of presence. His manner, we are told, lacked grace, he did not know how to manage his arms; his Irish accent did not fall appealingly on English ears,¹ and, not being a person of social consequence, he could not afford, like Fox, to neglect appearances. A wig, by no means of the newest, surmounted a spectacled face, an inquiring nose, and a coat which is said to have been generally too tight. In fact, while he had no lack of home truths to tell the House of Commons, he lacked Sir Francis Burdett's exterior advantages. Nor was he by any means careful of the minor proprieties. On the occasion of Sir Gilbert Elliot's taking his seat in the House, Burke 'forgot where he was', as Sir Gilbert complained, 'so far as to bellow out to me by name as I was going down the floor to go to dinner that I must not go out, and then scampered after me'. But this was a mild instance enough. When he was really excited,

¹ Cf. a contemporary skit in verse (*Simpkins' Letters*) on the speeches for the prosecution in the Warren Hastings trial.

'For so pleasant is he, that he cannot "fateague 'um"
'Tho' he spoke for a twelvemonth concerning the "Bheagum".'

especially in his later years, he could do and say anything. As early as 1778 we hear of him flinging a volume of estimates at the Treasury Bench.

HIS oratory was like no one else's; that is one of the few points on which the select audience who sat through all his speeches found themselves in agreement with their weaker and far more numerous brethren. It had, naturally and necessarily, some qualities in common with that of his age and his nation, but he raised these to the highest plane. What in a lesser man would be magniloquence is in him magnificence. High-sounding effects which, at a distance absolutely immeasurable, would remind us of the rant and froth of the Irish agitator, are, in Burke, not only felt to be the authentic echo of a noble and generous spirit, but seen to be rooted in reasoning and in fact. The grand generalisations in which he abounds always spring straight out of the situation before him; his imaginative amplifications of particular topics are, so far from being otiose, always strictly relevant to the argument. To take two well-known instances from a later period. His famous 'tirade' on Marie Antoinette, in the long written speech which he called *Reflections on the French Revolution*, was, as we shall see, a powerful reinforcement of his argument as to the moral value to civilisation of the emotions which her fall evoked. The description of the descent of Hyder Ali into the Carnatic in the *Nabob of Arcot's Debts* illustrates as nothing else could the necessary consequences of the tortuous policy which it was Burke's purpose to expose.¹

¹ Erskine (see Prior, p. 507 n) considered these passages to be faulty from the practical point of view, as tending to distract the

Burke did not, we are told by his earliest biographer, write out any of his speeches beforehand, but 'upon every grand occasion his preparatory efforts were astonishing; he read, he deeply meditated, and, when his genius kindled, he started up, he harangued, he declaimed aloud, he rehearsed, as it were, every speech with all the ardour and animation of reality'.¹ As soon as he was out of his study, and on his legs in the House of Commons, his animation redoubled. When the occasion was not a great one, and sometimes when it was, his impetuosity outran his preparation; he did not care what he said. The most vivid imagination that has ever been given to an orator, and one of the richest vocabularies that has ever been given to any English writer, were always liable to run away with him unless he saw any reason to keep himself carefully in check. Being Burke, what came into his head was generally as striking in conception as it was noble in expression, but, whatever it was, out it came.

Burke's overflowing mind, and his consequent habit of viewing a matter in as many relations as possible, naturally made him seem discursive. He was not exactly an incisive, nor, as we have seen, was he a brief speaker. But the slightest examination

minds of the audience from the argument. It may well be so, but Erskine's opinion that the passages in question did not 'run along the lines of his subject-matter' seems quite wrong. Erskine himself was, of course, an advocate pure and simple.

¹ Cf Moore's *Memoirs* (1856), II 350. 'Talked of the memorandums for speeches among [Sheridan's] papers. How different from those left among Burke's. The latter were merely memorandums of the reasoning, for Burke could trust the wealth of his imagination. Sheridan, on the contrary, whose imagination was slow, took notes chiefly of the shining parts, the figures, jokes, etc., etc.'

suffices to show that his general amplitude was the amplitude of thought and imaginative illustration, and owed nothing to the conventional verbiage which distinguished and distinguishes much political oratory. His mind was of the sort which abhors a vacuum, nor had he in actual fact very much opportunity of learning the circumlocutory style which office must often impose upon its holders. One aspect of his essential directness calls for special mention. Johnson thought his style of speaking too 'familiar'. He certainly blends the homeliest words into the texture of his rhetoric, his vision being of the same universal quality, but 'familiarity' is certainly not the predominant impression made by his published speeches¹. However, there is abundant evidence that he had no aversion from any sort of language. 'Burke', writes a scandalised gentleman in a note to Rogers' *Table Talk*, 'always disappointed me as a speaker. I have heard him during his speeches in the House make use of the most vulgar expressions, such as "three nips of straw", "three skips of a louse", and, on one occasion when I was present, he introduced, as an illustration, a most indelicate story of a French King who asked his physician why his natural children were so much finer than his legitimate.' If this was all that struck Mr. Maltby about Burke's oratory, he must have been more remarkable for the delicacy of his feelings than for the powers of his understanding, and, in any case, the characteristic to which he alludes, taken in combination with other things, shows that the speaker was a man cast in a large mould. At the other extreme, and when his

¹ But cf. the last of these speeches, that on the *Nabob of Arcot's Debts*, which contains some very 'familiar' language.

feelings were really worked up, Burke was capable of quoting the Lord's Prayer in a speech on the appointment of supervisors for the East India Company,¹ and this is not the only occasion when his scriptural illustrations seem unintentionally blasphemous. His imagination was liable to run into all manner of unexpected directions. In the rank physical metaphors in which he occasionally indulged—metaphors from the dunghill and the lazar house, from surgery and obstetrics, from the butcher's shop and the scavenger's cart—he reminds us somewhat of Swift. But Burke is never morbid in this respect, his mind, unlike that of Swift, never plays round hideous images for their own sake, though he may occasionally elaborate them for rhetorical purposes. His taste has been censured often enough, but, after all, it is poor work wishing to trim a great irregular genius down to our own ideas of propriety, or quarrelling with the width of the field from which he drew an imagery as rich almost as that of any English prose writer.

To collect and quote instances, as has sometimes been done, of Burke's more eccentric metaphors would be to give a wrong impression of the general tone of his style. It was only occasionally that he offended his hearers by ebullitions of a kind which were deplored alike by Johnson and by Wilkes, the latter indeed referring to 'whisky and potatoes' in this connection. But he was by this time beginning to offend them in a more unfortunate manner. He had indeed some of the qualities needed for moving a mass of men. He could feel intensely, only too intensely, and he took instant fire from contact with an audience;

¹ *Collected Speeches*, 1. 150.

Lecky has remarked the contrast between the cool accounts of political events which he wrote year by year for the *Annual Register* and the impassioned harangues which he delivered upon many of them in the House of Commons. But of a third ingredient of the orator, viz. sensitiveness to the moods of his audience, he had nothing whatever, in Bagehot's words as applied to Coleridge, 'like a Christian divine, he did not regard persons'. As Thurlow remarked of their respective American speeches, 'Fox spoke to the House; Burke spoke as though he were speaking to himself'. The circumstances in which he often spoke worked also against him, especially in his early years. The well-known sobriquet of the 'dinner-bell' was possibly a posthumous invention, and was certainly not applied to him until long after this time. He was, on the contrary, in the habit of speaking late in the evening,¹ out of deference to his party superiors. Honourable members had dined by that time, and dined as gentlemen of that age were in the habit of dining. Many would be averse, and not a few would be incapacitated, from following him, and it must be confessed that Burke's rapidly spoken masterpieces demanded a degree of concentrated attention incompatible with anything but the strictest sobriety.² 'Mr. Burke next entered on a disquisition on the nature of government, of which we lament not to be able to give an adequate idea,' writes a panting reporter on one occasion, and remarks of this kind are not infrequent in the *Parliamentary History*.

¹ *Corr.*, 1. 289.

² What some critics consider to be the finest of all his speeches, viz. that on the *Nabob of Arcot's Debts* (1785), was actually delivered under these conditions, see p. 160 following.

The Philistines would snore unabashed ; the sarcastic would mutter that, how marvellous soever the stream that was pouring from Burke's fervent lips, there was such a quality as mercy. This was unfortunate both ways ; what the audience lost is sufficiently obvious, and neglect increased Burke's constitutional irritability.

However, we must avoid anticipating tendencies which, though already apparent, were not to become strongly pronounced until later. Burke was a considerable power in the House of Commons during his earlier years, especially after his election for Bristol in 1774. He was the intellectual support of an important party, and his published speeches and pamphlets gave him a wide outside reputation. He had a strong hold over the best minds, and he could on occasion dominate the whole House by sheer weight of metal. The days were still a good way off as to which Macaulay has said that ' whenever Burke rose to speak, his voice was drowned by the unseemly interruptions of lads who were in their cradles when his orations on the Stamp Act called forth the applause of the great Earl of Chatham '.

CHAPTER IV

PURCHASE OF THE BEACONSFIELD ESTATE—BURKE AND JOHNSON

IN May 1768 we find Burke writing to Shackleton as follows—it is important to give his actual words :

As to myself, I am, by the singular kindness of some friends, in a way very agreeable to me. Again elected in the same interest, I have made a push with all that I could collect of my own and the aid of my friends to cast a little root in this country. I have purchased a house, with an estate of about six hundred acres of land, in Buckinghamshire, twenty-four miles from London, where I now am. It is a place exceedingly pleasant, and I propose (God willing) to become a farmer in good earnest.

The house, variously called ‘Gregories’ or ‘Butler’s Court’, was, to judge by a contemporary print, large and imposing. It was burnt down not many years after Burke’s death, but its situation, about a mile from Beaconsfield, is, or was, marked by a spot called ‘Burke’s Grove’.

Burke’s phrases are significant. It is evident that the step above mentioned was prompted not entirely by an ambition to cut a figure in the world, or by the desire, avowed in the very first days of his transplantation, to possess land of his own to farm. Property of £300 a year was then a legal qualification for the representation of a county, and, though this

did not apply to a borough such as Wendover, current opinion, in which Burke cordially concurred, demanded that a man should as a rule possess some portion of the land which he undertook to govern. High as the cost of the estate was,¹ Burke's position and prospects probably made it appear not an absolutely unreasonable venture to a sanguine man. He was making himself useful to some very wealthy and important people. He also presumably looked forward to attaining office and the emoluments attached thereto at some not very remote period; and, in fact, North's administration of 1770 was not at first expected to last long. The office which eventually fell to Burke's lot was, as we shall see, an exceedingly lucrative one; the long time which was to elapse before he got it, and, more especially, the rapid turns of the political wheel which deprived him of it so soon, were things which could not possibly have been foreseen.

As to how he got the money, we know, practically speaking, no more than he tells us, viz. mainly by borrowing. He borrowed partly from Rockingham, and also, as we know, from other sources, and much the larger part of the purchase-money remained on

¹ Variouslly stated at £20,000 or £23,000; but Burke had to take over some expensive pictures, etc. Lord Morley thinks the matter has not been properly dealt with by Burke's biographers, but material for its discussion does not exist. The matter has been exhaustively investigated by Dilke (*Papers of a Critic*, vol. ii), but even that ingenious critic could not make bricks without straw. Burke expressly denied ever having been concerned in dealing in East India stock (letter in *Works*, viii 453). As regards a bill filed against Burke later by Lord Verney, see note to Mr Birrell's paper on Burke in *Obiter Dicta*. To go on to say, as Dilke seems quite unaccountably inclined to do, that Burke's political career was substantially affected by his financial circumstances seems sufficiently refuted by its whole course; and one or two instances cited by Dilke are so obviously insufficient to support any such charge that it is not worth while to discuss them.

mortgage. It is likely enough, though there is no evidence, that he benefited by the temporary affluence of his relatives, who were speculating hard. That there was nothing in this purchase or its accompaniments which Burke or his friends considered dishonourable seems sufficiently obvious. No reasonably ambitious man was freer from the grosser forms of self-seeking, and he was, as we shall see, capable of making great pecuniary sacrifices for a principle. Otherwise, it is clear enough that he had a soul above the details of personal as distinct from national expenditure, and that his attitude towards the former was not only that traditionally attributed to his nation, but that generally adopted by such of the public men of his own day as were not the eighteenth-century equivalents of millionaires. They all borrowed, for at any rate so long as their more sanguine friends were willing to trust them. At a particularly acute crisis in Fox's financial affairs it was proposed to get up a subscription for him at Brooks', but some doubt was expressed as to 'how Charles would take it'. 'Why, immediately, of course,' was the reply, and Burke would have done the same. It was the age not only of Fox but of Sheridan, who, when he was asked by an importunate creditor to name a day for settlement, named the Day of Judgement, 'or, as that will be a busy day, let us say the day after', and of the younger Pitt, whose case was different indeed from theirs, but who died £40,000 in debt. Burke was as ready to borrow from Garrick, Reynolds, Brocklesby, as he was to assist Crabbe, Barry, and, later on, a host of French exiles.

Burke's purchase was, as it turned out, a disastrous

mistake ; he had hitherto been a poor man, he was henceforth to be an embarrassed man. The question of how he managed to find the money to become at any rate the nominal owner of the Beaconsfield estate is dwarfed by the question of how he managed to keep it up when purchased, and to make it the centre of a liberal hospitality. But there is no doubt whatever that he was always in debt to somebody. He inherited indeed an Irish estate of the value of six thousand pounds, but his main source of financial aid probably at this time, and certainly later, was Rockingham. The benefactions of this nobleman to Burke were, to use the beneficiary's own words as employed in a different connection, such as 'to outrage economy and stagger credibility'. There is as good authority as can be expected in the circumstances for saying that, from first to last, Burke received from Rockingham sums amounting to no less than thirty thousand pounds.¹

Burke was now well known both in Parliament and outside, and his speeches and pamphlets had, as was inevitable, made him many enemies among the King's party. An instance of high Tory opinion on Burke about this time is afforded by a divine who was to have a share in forming the mind and the morals of the future George IV., and was later to occupy the highest position but one in the Church.

¹ McCormick, writing very shortly after Burke's death, gives this as the sum, and, many years later, a representative of the then Lord Fitzwilliam informed MacKnight to the same effect. The Lord Fitzwilliam (son of the Irish viceroy) who was one of the editors of Burke's correspondence, said in a note that Burke had 'a considerable private fortune', which seems an exaggeration, and generously said nothing about the extent of Burke's obligations to his own family.

Bishop Markham¹ was moved to express his opinion on Burke's public life in language, as Sidney Smith said of another episcopal outbreak, appropriate 'to the apostolic occupation of trafficking in fish'. Burke 'maltreated the highest persons in the Kingdom'; he 'displayed an arrogance which in a man of his condition was intolerable'; and his house, in allusion apparently to his supposed connection with the *Letters of Junius*, was a 'hole of adders'. Hostile newspapers called Burke an Irish adventurer, a Papist in disguise, and a creature 'of Rockingham's'. But whatever was said about Burke by political opponents or by the newspapers, who and what exactly his father was—he was, in point of fact, a perfectly respectable solicitor—how many of his relations were Roman Catholics, all this was less than nothing to the Whig peers, to whom he had become quite indispensable.

In 1772 the Opposition was, as we have seen, at a low ebb. Some talked of seceding from Parliament, and Burke had to write to his chiefs seriously and at length on the position and prospects of the party. One November day of that year, in splendid hunting weather, the Duke of Richmond was discomposed at receiving a letter from Burke urging that the state of public affairs required his immediate presence in London. Burke relented as to this demand, but made up for it by a subsequent dozen pages on the political situation and also upon the character and attributes of the English aristocracy.

'You are in general somewhat languid, scrupulous and unsystematic,' said this stern monitor, 'but men of high birth and great property are rarely as enterprising as others,

¹ *Corr*, i. 276 sq.

and for reasons that are very natural . . . Persons in your station of life ought to have long views. You people of great families and hereditary trusts and fortunes are not like such as I am, who, whatever we may be, by the rapidity of our growth and even by the fruit we bear, flatter ourselves that, while we creep on the ground, we belly into melons that are exquisite for size and flavour. . . It has been remarked that there were two ancient families at Rome . . .

‘My dear Burke,’ the Duke wrote in reply, ‘although it would have been more inconvenient to me to go to London than I can well describe, I had, nevertheless, at your desire settled everything here as well as I could and intended setting off to-day. Your letter, which arrived last night, was like a reprieve, and I shall make use of it. . . I confess I could wish not to stir from here till after Christmas, but I most of all wish to be at some certainty, as I have engaged a large party some months ago to come here on the first of December and stay a month to fox-hunt . . .

P.S.—I have ordered my servant to stay in London till Friday to bring your letter. I cannot sufficiently thank you for the very pleasant letter you wrote me before ; it was long, but not half long enough.’

He was a courteous man, was the Duke of Richmond.

We will now follow the writer of the former of these letters into a society different from that of the Whig magnates. If, after hearing Burke in the House of Commons, we had then had a few words with him, he would very likely, especially if we came from Ireland, have asked us to call on him the next day. We might have accepted this invitation with some trepidation. We might have conjectured that, in private life, the orator might have proved to be a perfectly ruthless talker, possessed of a fund of knowledge, a willingness to impart that knowledge, and a lofty vein of sentiment, such as, in their combined effect, might have rendered him a terror to society.

This conjecture would have been erroneous. We should have found out that Burke on politics and Burke off politics were two different men. We should have found him an exceedingly pleasant companion and a not particularly engrossing talker¹ It is abundantly plain that, in every private relation of life, Burke was a very good fellow. He would certainly not have been a popular member of Johnson's club, in fact, he would not have been a member of the club at all, if he had not added that qualification to his other powers and virtues.

Johnson's Club, the word being defined by its unofficial president as 'an assembly of good fellows meeting under certain conditions', touched life at every point. Its original composition was reflected in its subsequent growth. Of the original members, as we need scarcely point out, Langton was a country gentleman, Reynolds was an artist, Beauclerk a man of fashion, Nugent, Burke's father-in-law, a physician, Chamier had been a stockbroker. Nor were even the professional members confined to one speciality; it was not an age of specialists. Garrick was a bibliophile as well as an actor; Burney knew much besides his art; Hawkins, who remained a member only until it appeared that his suspicions of the Irish adventurer were not shared by the rest, was an active London magistrate and also the historian of music. Their conversation, though perhaps predominantly literary, was by no means exclusively so. No man knew more

¹ 'Gentle, mild, and amenable to argument in private society,' says Wraxall 'Not very,' adds Mrs. Piozzi in her annotations to Wraxall's *Memoirs* But the lady disliked Burke, and has left some silly verses to the effect that he had vulgar companions. She probably meant Richard Burke and some of the latter's associates.

of life as well as of letters than the presiding genius, or was less likely to tolerate the fads and the whimsies of which a merely literary coterie is the fruitful parent. Politics was the one subject which the members do not appear to have been particularly fond of discussing, nor, considering that the two leading lights held opposite views and that each was gifted with unlimited powers of expressing them, is this avoidance surprising. Burke would have received no encouragement from the Club to declaim upon the merits of the Rockinghams, the increasing powers of the Crown, or the wrongs of our American brethren. However, Burke and Johnson must have discussed America sometimes, and we regret that Boswell is silent on this head. The decent though obviously reluctant manner in which, on one occasion, he refused to exhibit his 'honoured father' and his 'respected friend' as 'intellectual gladiators for the entertainment of the public', would not have been operative here.

That Burke was a wonderful talker everyone agreed. Other qualities apart, he had a sound foundation for a conversationalist of a particular type,—plenty of animal spirits combined with very wide interests. Genial with the geniality of his nation, exuberant, excitable, no more prudish than were other gentlemen of that age, liking and himself coining some *bon mots* of a tolerably broad character,¹ he does not seem to have talked too much for the Club whatever he did for the House of Commons. He could display a Hibernian exaggeration at times, and he amazed Sir Gilbert Elliot by talking of one of the latter's speeches as 'the most beautiful thing that ever was

* ¹ Some are quoted at the beginning of McCormick's biography

heard, divine beyond human sweetness', and so on. Generally speaking, he probably talked more 'like a book', as we say, than a man would now, but into rotund sentences, containing a fair share of long words, vigorous colloquialisms and frank turns of speech would find their way. He talked probably much as he spoke, *mutatis mutandis*, and with the same stream of thought and knowledge. Everyone knows how Johnson said of him that if you were to take shelter by chance with Burke under a shed you would say he was a wonderful man; that if Burke were to go into a stable to see his horse dressed, the ostler would say, 'we have had an extraordinary man here'. It was the same everywhere. Merchants were astonished by his knowledge of commerce; agriculturists by his knowledge of agriculture; philologists by his knowledge of language; antiquarians by his knowledge of antiquities; Adam Smith by his knowledge of political economy. The only subjects that, according to Hamilton, Burke did not understand were music and gaming.

Johnson, for all his admiration of Burke, was not inclined to flatter him; his judgement of Burke's genius was as cool and manly as was his judgement of Burke's house; '*non equidem invideo, miror magis.*' Nor, though he acknowledged the qualities of Burke's oratory, was he inclined to overrate the powers required for public speaking in the ordinary way. Making speeches was, he held, a knack which could be acquired by practice, but conversation, being a close tussle of wits, was a severer test of capacity. It is evident that a society which, following its leader, held this gladiatorial idea of conversation, and thought little of the lucky hits.

and endearing irrelevances of Goldsmith, provided a favourable field for Burke's colloquial talents. In intellectual quality, in range of information, Burke was speedily recognised as the foremost member of this as he would have been of any other society. But he made no attempt to challenge Johnson's general predominance, grounded as it was not merely on seniority, but on sheer force of character, and on an incisiveness of mind and speech which Burke by comparison lacked. Well known as it is, an anecdote in Boswell on this head must be repeated. 'As Johnson always allowed the extraordinary talents of Mr. Burke, so Mr. Burke was fully sensible of the wonderful powers of Johnson. Mr. Langton recollects having passed an evening with both of them, when Mr. Burke repeatedly entered upon topics which it is evident he would have illustrated with extensive knowledge and richness of expression, but Johnson always seized upon the conversation, in which, however, he acquitted himself in a most masterly manner. As Mr. Burke and Mr. Langton were walking home, Mr. Burke observed that Johnson had been very great that night. Mr. Langton joined in this, but added, he would have wished to hear more from another person (plainly intimating that he meant Mr. Burke). "Oh, no," said Mr. Burke, "it is enough for me to have rung the bell to him."'

Burke's table talk has almost entirely perished; a few stories and a few sayings have been preserved in Boswell and elsewhere, but they are the merest crumbs from what must have been a rich feast. His writings cannot be expected to show him as he was when off duty. Nor do his letters bear much witness

to his lighter hours ; most of them show, in fact, a dreadful resemblance to his speeches. We cannot indeed wish that Johnson's biographer had transferred his allegiance, though we may echo the sublime aspiration of an early nineteenth-century critic of Burke (Gilfillan). 'What a pity Boswell had not been born a twin, and that the brother had not attached himself as fondly and faithfully to Burke as Jemmy to Johnson. Boswell's *Life of Burke* would now have been even more popular than Boswell's *Life of Johnson*.' The fates decreed that Boswell should be unique, and he was too great an artist to have been willing to divert attention from his central figure. But we may none the less wish that he had given us more of Burke. He had, one would have thought, a striking contrast ready to his hand, a contrast between one whose province was human nature as shown in the ordinary conduct of life, and one whose province was human nature in politics. But Burke could not have replaced Johnson as a subject for Boswell's art. Man for man, Johnson was the stronger. His personality fills his world as Burke's could never have done ; the spontaneous process of lay canonisation which has overtaken him is the outcome of a sound instinct. Nor does it appear that the pith of Burke's conversation would have been very readily reproducible. As Coleridge remarks, he never seems to have said those short, sharp things which stamp themselves upon the memory. He was indeed familiar with many aspects of English society ; he knew a great deal about the ways in which men live and get their living ; and he had, if not much insight into individual character, an imagination which never lost sight of the individual

in the mass. But his best thoughts and words belong, as a rule, to the wisdom of politics rather than to that of workaday human life, and, even when they do not, they have not the same intimate appeal as Johnson's. 'A great Empire and little minds go ill together'; 'Their passions forge their fetters'; 'He censures God who quarrels with the imperfections of man', do not come so nearly home to us as, 'No man is a hypocrite in his pleasures', 'Talk like other people, but clear your mind of cant'; 'They pay you by feeling'.

'It is absurd,' wrote Boswell to Temple in 1775, 'to hope for continual happiness in this life, few men, if any, enjoy it. I have a kind of belief that Edmund Burke does, he has so much knowledge, so much animation, and the consciousness of so much fame'

Burke had not yet become soured by perpetual disappointment; he was as buoyant as his countryman Goldsmith; the load of debt which was to oppress his later years he could still bear lightly, for Rockingham was behind him. As to his personal habits, he had no expensive tastes and was a very moderate drinker, seldom exceeding, we are told, 'one bottle after dinner'. He made up for this relative abstinence, however, in one curious manner. He was in the habit of drinking quantities of hot water, as hot as he could bear it, 'hot water being', he said, 'the finest stimulant in the world'. It would have been better if he had confined himself entirely to stimulants of the orthodox variety, and it is possible that this habit had something to do with the gastric malady of which he died.

With Irish hospitality and good nature he welcomed all and sundry at Beaconsfield, and liked to ask people

in to take pot luck in the modest London houses which he rented from time to time. Not one man in fifty would have done what he did for the conceited and impossible artist Barry. Some years after the present time it fell to him to rescue one who was to be a favourite poet of Byron, Scott, Cardinal Newman, and Edward FitzGerald. The political situation was then most critical; Lord North's Government was tottering to its fall; Burke himself was thundering against the Noble Lord in the blue riband; Fox was soon to demand the Noble Lord's head on a charger; the Opposition saw at length a prospect of office. In the midst of all this, a note was left for Burke at his London house by a young man who, in his own words, 'was without a friend, without employment, and without bread', and was meanwhile pacing Westminster Bridge and awaiting the reception of his note in an agony of suspense. Burke saw Crabbe when he returned, found time to listen to his story, and asked him to Beaconsfield. Crabbe submitted to his generous host 'a large quantity of miscellaneous compositions on a variety of subjects, which he was soon taught to appreciate at their proper value'. When Burke came to *The Village* he concluded that Crabbe was a poet.¹ He put Crabbe in the way of being ordained and of finding some clerical preferment. Crabbe repaid his benefactor by depicting him as Eusebius in the *Borough*, in lines which savour more of gratitude than of exact delineation.

In his country home Burke was, by all accounts,

¹ The passage which convinced Burke is said to have been that from 'As on their neighbouring beach yon swallows stand' to 'And begs a poor protection from the poor', not far from the beginning of the poem.

a model country gentleman, kind to his poorer neighbours, to whom he was liberal of advice, and, when they were in distress, of something that they doubtless valued more, and glad to take a hand in everything that was going forward in the parish. When any of his tenants or of his family were ill, he was fond, we are told, of dosing them himself, and once, owing to an unfortunate inadvertence in the matter of bottles, he nearly killed Mrs Burke. He threw himself into farming with the greatest zeal, but with results as to which accounts vary. He understood the subject no doubt, as he would have understood any subject to which he gave a fraction of his mind, and corresponded on agricultural topics with Arthur Young.

One of the grand points in controversy (a controversy, indeed, chiefly carried on between practice and speculation) is that of deep ploughing. In your last volume you seem, on the whole, rather against that practice, and have given several reasons for your judgment which deserve well to be considered. In order to know how we ought to plough, we ought to know what end it is we propose to ourselves in that operation. The first and instrumental end is to divide the soil; the last and ultimate end, so far as regards the plants, is to facilitate the pushing of the blade upwards, and the shooting of the roots in all the inferior directions. There is further proposed a more ready admission of external influences—the rain, the sun, the air, charged with all those heterogeneous contents, some, possibly all, of which are necessary for the nourishment of the plants. By ploughing deep you answer these ends on a greater mass of the soil. This would seem in favour of deep ploughing. . . .¹

This letter, as Mr. Birrell remarks, is not that of a practical farmer. One can only hope that Burke had a good bailiff.

¹ *Works*, viii. 444.

CHAPTER V

AMERICAN SPEECHES—ELECTION FOR BRISTOL— ECONOMICAL REFORM

(1774-1780)

THE American situation was soon to come to a head. In considering the part which Burke had already played therein, and the greater part which he was still to play, we must remember the peculiar circumstances of the case. No legal question, for such was its ostensible character, was probably ever discussed before such a large audience, over such a number of years, and in every variety of speech, treatise, and pamphlet. How far exactly were the colonies subordinate to the mother country ; in what sense could the principle of ‘ no taxation without representation ’ be held to apply to them ; on what grounds, whether of ‘ natural rights ’, or of their own charters, or of the British Constitution, could they claim exemption from Parliamentary taxation—questions of this kind and their application to particular incidents and regulations, were hotly debated by the keenest minds on both sides of the Atlantic.¹ Burke broke in upon all this

¹ ‘ The struggle between Great Britain and her colonies in America . . . concerned one and the same thing, the theory, in public and private relations, of legal right , the popular name for which, both in England and America, was freedom. . . . Every

with impassioned reference to the fact of colonial resistance. While others argued, he, who could argue with the best of them, could also see. He *saw* the English revenue officers about their hated task in Boston harbour, he *saw* the sharp-faced lawyers arguing in the American provincial assemblies, and *saw*, as it were, the best part of the British Empire slipping away for the sake of a formula. His innate distrust of abstract principles in politics, his ever-present sense of the impotence of theories in the face of life, was sharpened by the fact that his earliest experience of politics coincided with a time when such things were debated as they had seldom been debated before and have never been debated since. Was it, he asked, worth while? Could we not abandon the whole unprofitable business and, reverting to the *status quo ante*, restore the previous 'unsuspecting confidence' of the colonies in the mother country? This last would, for all Burke's assertions, have been easier said than done; to have attempted to put the clock back to that extent would have been hopeless; nor had the previous attachment of the colonies to England been such as to stand much strain. However, if his advice had been followed, one thing at least would have been gained,—time.

In 1771 Burke, always in want of money, had accepted the position of paid agent in London to the colony of New York. This, though not an improper,

argument, finally, as the struggle went on, planted itself in legal right. Whether the struggle was of the issuance of writs of assistance, or of the extension of admiralty jurisdiction, or of the general powers of Parliament over the colonies . . . Right, according to English law, is a train of light by which both sides professed to be led.' (Prof. M. A. Bigelow in *Cambridge Modern History*, vii. 175.)

was an unfortunate step, since it necessarily seemed to detract from the disinterestedness of his advocacy of the American cause. Townshend's taxes had been meanwhile repealed, with the fatal exception of that on tea, which was retained as an assertion of the supremacy of Parliament as embodied in the Declaratory Act. Some of the colonists had meanwhile been willing to receive and pay duty on tea imported from England; others had refused to drink any tea save such as could be smuggled from Holland. But a test case arose. The East India Company, which was in financial straits, brought pressure to bear on the English Government. It was decided to land a large quantity of the Company's tea in America subject to a duty moderate enough to render it cheaper than that obtained from Holland. The separatist party at Boston took drastic action. The 'Boston Tea-Party' was the last straw, and the English Parliament was at last thoroughly alarmed. Matters were indeed complicated enough, and every conceivable factor was at work to perplex the minds of observers; differences of feeling as between state and state; one party working for separation and another party regarding real and formal separation as unthinkable; to which may be added violent differences of opinion in the English Parliament itself, of which the colonists were kept fully informed by their London agents. The Government had, from the debating point of view, an easy escape from the horns of a dilemma once propounded by Burke, viz. that, if they knew the facts, they ought to have taken measures accordingly, or, if they did not know the facts, their ignorance was criminal.

It was on March 4, 1774, that the first official information of the Boston resistance reached Parliament. North at once proposed and carried punitive measures against the offending port and against the constitution of the province. Burke's contribution to the question took the form of the first of the great parliamentary speeches which he published himself, viz. that on *American Taxation* (April 19, 1774). The first part is a close and vigorous argument as to the expediency of repealing the tea duty; the second part consists of a history of the whole subject of American taxation since 1766, in which Burke assumes the right and the expediency of the trade laws as a matter of course. He enlivens his discussion with some interesting sketches of some of the chief actors. There was Grenville, a lawyer and an official man of the best type, who 'thought better of the wisdom and power of human legislation than in truth it deserves', who was admirable as long as things went on as usual, but useless when 'the high roads are broken up, and the waters are out, when a new and troubled scene is opened, and the file affords no precedent'. There was Townshend, whose fatal vacillations sprang from a desire to please everybody, but 'to tax and to please, no more than to love and to be wise, is not given to men. However, he attempted it.' On the broad question Burke claimed, and in a sense justly, that the repeal of the Stamp Act had quietened the colonies, though he did not allow enough for the activities of those who were determined to keep alive the separatist opinion which the Act itself had created. The 'Declaratory Act', with its assertion of a general principle, he handles somewhat gingerly: his real

sentiments on the legal question break out with sudden warmth :

Again and again, revert to your own principles—seek peace and ensue it—leave America, if she has taxable matter in her, to tax herself. I am not here going into the distinction of rights, not attempting to mark their boundaries. I do not enter into these metaphysical distinctions ; I hate the very sound of them.

In adopting coercive measures the King had public opinion behind him. Burke and the Whigs never spoke for the ‘ man in the street ’, who asked impatiently what was the use of the colonies if they behaved in this manner ? It was confidently expected that the first British reinforcements landed would make short work of the whole business, and it certainly appears that, if the war had been energetically begun and subsequently conducted with even moderate intelligence, the rebellious colonists might have been reduced to a temporary submission. Average Tory sentiment was voiced by Johnson in his *Taxation no Tyranny* (1775)—a pamphlet which, in its utter disregard of the actual temper of the colonists, and in the hardness of its reasoning on the legal question, provided a lively example of the attitude of mind which Burke was combating. Did the Americans, the Doctor asked in effect, suppose that when the nation sent out a colony it established an independent power ? Their charters were English, their laws were English, the arms which protected them were English ; why should they not submit to English taxation ? They wanted, in fact, to enjoy the advantages of being in two places at once. They, or their ancestors, would perhaps have been entitled to votes in England, but a voluntary

act had rendered impossible the exercise of that power. If, finally, it were expected that despotic action of the government abroad would lead to despotic action at home, if slavery after all were so contagious, how was it that we heard the 'loudest yelps for liberty from the drivers of negroes'?

At the beginning of the year in which this provocative though not very important tract was issued, Chatham, from the side of the Opposition, brought in a most thorough-going conciliatory bill which was summarily rejected. Massachusetts had just been declared in rebellion when North, who had acted with moderation throughout, brought forward some resolutions which startled the House. He proposed to exempt from taxation any colony which should make such a contribution for the purposes of common defence and civil government as would satisfy Parliament. This proposal, which went too far for the extreme Tories and not far enough for the Whigs, was only passed with the greatest difficulty, and the Whigs were now, very reasonably, called upon to show their hand. Their plan was embodied by Burke in a series of resolutions proposing to abandon any reference to the English parliament; to leave the separate colonial assemblies to vote their own expenses; to revert, in short, to the situation as it was before the Stamp Act. These resolutions he moved in the best known of all his speeches, that on *Conciliation with the Colonies* (March 22, 1775).

In the introduction, Burke welcomes, as well he might, the conciliatory spirit shown in North's resolutions, reserving their details for subsequent slaughter. He then strikes the dominant note firmly in the follow-

ing passage, with its felicitous recurring emphasis on the leading term.

The proposition is Peace. Not Peace through the medium of War, not Peace to be hunted through the labyrinth of intricate and endless negotiations, not Peace to arise out of universal discord, fomented, from principle, in all parts of the Empire; not Peace to depend on the juridical determination of perplexing questions; or the precise marking the shadowy boundaries of a complex Government. It is simple Peace; simple in its natural course and in its ordinary haunts. It is Peace sought in the spirit of Peace, and laid in principles purely pacific. . . . My idea is nothing more. Refined policy ever has been the parent of confusion; and ever will be so, as long as the world endures. Plain good intention, which is as easily discovered at the first view, as fraud is surely detected at last, is, let me say, of no mean force in the government of mankind. Genuine simplicity of heart is an healing and cementing principle.

The condition of the American colonies, their population, trade and resources, are first described. 'We stand where we have an immense view of what is and what is past', and Burke communicates to his audience the chief features of the living panorama that lay spread before his mind's eye. Trade statistics are given, in order to show the enormous increase which has taken place in sixty-eight years. The figures—he gives a page of them—are such and such, and directly out of this sound business foundation rises one of the orator's purple passages—a passage not, however, in his best manner—on the venerable Lord Bathurst (Pope's friend). Lord Bathurst would remember 1704, and what if the 'angel of this auspicious youth had opened to him in vision' that he would live not only to see his son Lord Chancellor, but to see America, which had

served in his childhood for little more than childhood's tales, make as much progress in his own lifetime as England had done in seventeen hundred years. Such being the resources of America, force was of no use, and a consideration of the objections to its employment as being uncertain in its operation and tending to impair its object, leads the orator to his famous discussion of the character of the colonists. Their 'fierce love of liberty' is traced to its sources in race, government, religion, manners, education, and locality; and such being the material situation and the moral temper of the colonists, how are we to deal with them? There are three alternatives. To alter the moral causes of their character is impossible, equally impossible is it to proscribe them as criminals. ('The thing seems a great deal too big for my ideas of jurisprudence. . . . I do not know the method of drawing up an indictment against a whole people.') The third and only possible alternative is to waive the question of legal right and to yield to their demands. ('It is not what a lawyer tells me I *may* do, but what humanity, reason and justice tell me I ought to do. Is a politic act the worse for being a generous one?') After some appeal to precedents for concessions of this character Burke proceeds, in the third division of the speech, to his own resolutions as above explained. He sharply criticises those of Lord North as a tricky attempt to divide the states one from another, and concludes by a famous peroration ('Magnanimity in politics is not seldom the truest wisdom, and a great empire and little minds go ill together').

This speech has, over all Burke's other writings, the advantage of subject-matter. It is not weighted

with a great deal of antiquated detail, and its leading idea is applied to a situation of intrinsic and enduring interest. The situation did not indeed challenge all Burke's mental and emotional capacity—it needed a greater revolution than the American for that—and the speech does not accordingly exhibit so fully as do some of his later works his characteristic power of commanding rather than winning assent by means of sudden and overwhelming strokes. But, whereas on the French Revolution, and also on India, he is sometimes frântic and often mistaken, here his temper and his knowledge are alike unimpeachable. If he did underrate the native feeling in favour of separation that existed in the colonies, he knew more about America than any one else in Parliament, more than he ever knew about France, and his knowledge was born of sympathy. The American patriots were sound Whigs in his eyes, and he found an analogy for their situation in that of the England of 1688.¹

Burke could always write with the concision and the reasoned gravity appropriate to a State Paper, as is seen in actual examples from all periods of his life and, in a more varied and extended form, in the *Discontents* pamphlet. But his imagination was always beating against formal restraints, and urging him to the superb imaginative passages which are found especially in his later works. However, the plain pattern, the steel framework, was never to be entirely concealed by ornateness of decoration and exuberance of fancy, and it is the combination of these two contrasted strains which is an important ingredient in a style of which the essential virtue, like that of all great style, eludes

¹ *Works*, iii. 29.

analysis. In the present speech the plain statement and the imaginative presentment of fact are about equally balanced, as we see in the following well-known passage.

The last cause of this disobedient spirit in the colonies is hardly less powerful than the rest, as it is not merely moral, but laid deep in the natural constitution of things. Three thousand miles of ocean lie between you and them. No contrivance can prevent the effect of this distance in weakening government. Seas roll, and months pass, between the order and the execution ; and the want of a speedy explanation of a single point is enough to defeat a whole system. *You have, indeed, winged ministers of vengeance, who carry your bolts in their pounces to the remotest verge of the sea. But there a power steps in, that limits the arrogance of raging passions and furious elements, and says So far shalt thou go and no farther Who are you that you should fret and rage and bite the chains of Nature ?* Nothing worse happens to you than does to all nations who have extensive Empire ; and it happens in all the forms into which Empire can be thrown *In large bodies, the circulation of power must be less vigorous at the extremities* Nature has said it The Turk cannot govern Egypt and Arabia and Curdistan as he governs Thrace ; nor has he the same dominion in Crimea and Algiers which he has at Brusa and Smyrna *Despotism itself is obliged to truck and huckster.* The Sultan gets such obedience as he can. . .

This speech, passing over the heads of its audience to posterity, is said to have driven members away who, when they read it in print, could scarcely talk of anything else. Not much account has survived of the debate as a whole, but it appears that Burke was, inevitably, accused of giving everything away under colour of announcing an obvious truth. Constitutional purists insisted that Parliament alone could levy money for the use of the Crown, and that any

Minister who devolved that duty on provincial assemblies would deserve impeachment. It would almost certainly have been better if, in the circumstances, Burke had endeavoured to build upon rather than to pull down North's well-meant and conciliatory proposals. But, before ever the intelligence of North's resolutions reached America, the first blood of what was to prove a seven years' war had been shed in a skirmish at Lexington.

Burke's own affairs had not stood still during the year which elapsed between the two American speeches ; he had lost his seat for Wendover. A fall in East India stock had been too much for Lord Verney as well as for Burke's own speculative brethren, and the first-named found himself unable to give away but obliged to sell the representation of that useful constituency. Burke, who could afford neither to purchase a seat nor to contest an election at prevailing prices, was in a difficulty. A constituency was at length found for him at Malton, in the East Riding of Yorkshire, of which the free and independent electors were amenable to Rockingham. But no sooner had Burke arrived at and been duly elected for Malton, than an invitation unexpectedly arrived for him from what was then the second city in the kingdom. A powerful section of Bristol merchants desired, it appeared, to be represented by a man who was sound on America and alive to commercial questions generally, and they were prepared to guarantee his expenses. From Malton to Bristol the invited candidate accordingly hastened ; the Bristol populace were gratified by the sight of Burke on the hustings ; and he was returned (November 1774). His speech after the

poll probably astonished both his constituents and his fellow-member, though the anecdote seems to be apocryphal which tells that the latter — Cruger by name—was only able to gasp out, ‘I say ditto to Mr. Burke.’ The question of ‘instructions’ to members was one on which incipient democratic feeling was laying emphasis, and Cruger is reported to have declared his willingness to obey implicitly the commands of his constituents. Burke expressed his total disagreement in a passage which has become classical.

Parliament is not a *congress* of ambassadors from different and hostile interests, which interests each must maintain, as an agent and advocate, against other agents and advocates; but Parliament is a *deliberative* assembly of *one* nation, with *one* interest, that of the whole, where, not local purposes, not local prejudices ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole. You choose a member indeed, but when you have chosen him, he is not member of Bristol, but he is a member of *parliament*. If the local constituent should have an interest, or should form a hasty opinion, evidently opposite to the real good of the rest of the community, the member for that place ought to be as far, as any other, from any endeavour to give it effect. I beg pardon for saying so much on this subject. I have been unwillingly drawn into it; but I shall ever use a respectful frankness of communication with you. Your faithful friend, your devoted servant, I shall be to the end of my life; a flatterer you do not wish for. On this point of instructions, however, I think it scarcely possible we ever can have any sort of difference. Perhaps I may give you too much, rather than too little trouble.

After this, it will not surprise us if the relations of Bristol with the most famous man that the ancient city has ever sent to the House of Commons were not to be altogether harmonious. Burke’s constituents expected him to send them any new Acts of Parliament

with full comments and explanations from his own pen, and in this as in other weighty matters Burke gave them of his best. But, in Macknight's naive words, 'He had also to attend to the private business of each of his supporters ; and he found, to his surprise, that they looked more to his ability to confer small favours of this nature than to his most arduous endeavours in a great line of imperial policy. This was a very humiliating discovery.' Nevertheless, to sit for Bristol improved Burke's position a good deal, and he was by now the spokesman of his party in the House of Commons.

The American War was meanwhile under weigh. Bunker's Hill had been fought, and in the succeeding November (1775) Burke delivered the third of his great speeches on America¹ Clearly envisaging the essentials of the situation, he warned the government of the inadequacy of their military preparations, if they really meant to fight, and they might have to fight France as well as America. There were three plans then afloat : the first, a war of conquest, which might be direct, or indirect by 'distress' ; the second, from which no good could be expected, a mixture of war and negotiation ; the third—which he never ceased to urge—peace by way of practically unlimited concession. Of these plans all but the last were tried. North's 'Prohibitory Bill' prohibited all commercial intercourse with the colonies, and by a clumsy mixture of war and peace, Commissioners were appointed with certain powers of negotiation. But the Americans refused to treat except on the basis of independence, an independence formally proclaimed on July 4, 1776. The war had meanwhile spread to the southern

¹ *Collected Speeches*, i. 340 (Nov. 16, 1775), not published by himself.

colonies, which were henceforth to be its chief theatre, and Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga marked the end of its first phase. The colonial leaders were now despatching a commission to France to purchase supplies, and the strange spectacle was seen of, in Carlyle's words, 'the sons of the Saxon Puritans . . . sleek Silas, sleek Benjamin, among the light children of Heathenism, Monarchy, Sentimentalism, and the Scarlet Woman'.

Burke's comments on some further punitive legislation directed against the colonists, and on the American situation generally, were duly communicated to his constituents in a very impressive *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol* (April 1777). The evil temper bred by civil strife—for it was in that light that Burke and the Whigs regarded the war—the broad principles which should regulate the relations of the mother country to colonies that were on the same level of civilisation as herself—these things may be commonplaces in themselves, but they cease to be so when transmuted through the energy of Burke's mind and the intensity of his feelings. His gesture of disgust, embodied in a well-known passage, at a man who 'calls for battles which he is not to fight, and contends for a violent dominion which he can never exercise', is not that of a sentimental humanitarian; Burke, for all his 'sensitivity',¹ was never that.

I know many have been taught to think, that moderation, in a case like this, is a sort of treason, and that all arguments for it are sufficiently answered by railing at

¹ Lord Morley (*Burke*, p. 130) has some admirable remarks on Burke's 'sensitivity'. Burke's own use of the word is highly characteristic; e.g. he says somewhere that 'a law-giver ought to have a heart full of sensibility'.

fairly acknowledge that I have not yet learned to delight in finding Fort Kniphausen in the heart of the British Empire.' The employment of Red Indians for the same purpose stirred Burke to the very depths, and a speech which he delivered on that subject was the most immediately effective of all that, from first to last, he ever delivered in the House of Commons. He had indeed a situation out of which any orator might have made something. Burgoyne, it is stated, had urged his prospective allies 'by the dictates of our holy religion and their reverence for our constitution' to repair to his Majesty's standard, and had subsequently exhorted them under no pretext to scalp the wounded, 'or even the dying'. Burke's speech exists only in a lifeless abstract, but various testimonies exist, from Horace Walpole and others, to the overpowering effect which it exerted on its hearers.

Early in that year (1778) North had made a last attempt at conciliation, offering almost the same terms as Burke had proposed in his great speech of three years previously. But it was then too late, and years too late. Even the briefest outline of the successive stages of the war would be superfluous in a short life of Burke. 'From war and blood,' he said, 'we went to submission; and from submission plunged back again to war and blood; to desolate and be desolated, without measure, hope, or end.' His voice was indeed still to be heard on America, but he had in reality shot his last bolt by 1778. France, none too soon for America, entered into the war at the beginning of that year; Spain followed her example in 1779; and in any case, the struggle had long ceased before to be affected by any possible reasoning or by any possible

eloquence. Burke's task had been impossible. Throughout the successive phases of the American question, throughout the first and temporarily successful attempt to find a formula, the wanton revival of the original ground of difference, throughout resistance, attempts at compromise, open war, further attempts at conciliation, his attitude had been that of wisdom and common sense. But he had no backing in the country, and was not in a position to make one. Only one man then living was or had been of the quality to cut the Gordian knot, —Chatham, as he was in his prime, when, in Lord Rosebery's words, 'his utterances, with a sort of wireless telegraphy, seemed to thrill the nation, which neither heard nor read them', but Chatham's day was long past.

North was meanwhile devoting to the King's service all the tact of an old parliamentary hand, all the skill of a practised speaker, and all the charm of manner which everybody acknowledged him to possess. Burke's opposition to North, however tremendously expressed, was strictly political, nor did he ever believe North to be personally corrupt. Politics apart, the two men liked one another. North, we are told, was always ready to oblige Burke, who was exceedingly good-natured in helping his friends, and had no more objection than any one else to a decent amount of jobbery. 'There is, my Lord,' Burke would say, 'an office vacant that will just suit a very able and worthy friend of mine; if you have no parliamentary interest to answer, do let him have it.' 'In this case,' North would reply, 'I am happy, my dear Mr. Burke, to be able to oblige you.'¹

But the amount of jobbery with which Burke was

¹ Bissett, 274.

soon to be called upon to deal was beyond all decency. The Opposition was reviving. The war had become unpopular, and its inefficient conduct, together with its great expense, gave the Whigs an opportunity of substituting a constructive for a purely critical policy. The King's influence, and this was in their eyes a 'King's war', was, as we have seen, largely maintained by a host of sinecure offices and pensions in his gift; the Civil List had become swollen with money used for purposes of parliamentary corruption; and the Opposition now determined to attack this influence at its source. Petitions for public economy, and in some cases for some measure of Parliamentary Reform, were pouring in from county meetings and associations, petitions which, though a symptom of nascent political democracy, were by no means purely democratic in origin. The Whigs found themselves for once carried along on a tide of popular feeling, and Burke, on their behalf, evolved some practical proposals for 'Economical Reform'. This change from a seemingly endless course of ineffective criticism put him into high good humour, a good humour which is reflected in the speech with which he introduced his *Plan for the better security of the Independence of Parliament and the Economical Reform of the Civil and other Establishments* (February 11, 1780). Briefly stated, the plan comprised a reform of the King's household and civil establishment; the suppression of a number of useless offices; reforms of the pension list and of various State Departments; and the abolition of the separate jurisdictions of the Principality of Wales, the Duchy of Lancaster, the County Palatine and Earldom of Chester, and the Duchy of Cornwall.

Burke's firm belief that the British Constitution of his own day worked well on the whole made him all the more disposed to reform it in any matters of which the existence might lend colour to demands for radical change. How, in the face of this speech, Macaulay could have said that Burke's sentiments towards the French Revolution resembled those of an 'antiquary who finds his shield scoured' passes comprehension. The separate jurisdictions of Chester and the like, the 'Gothic establishment' of the Royal Household, however ridiculous they had by now become, were ancient enough. Considering Burke's historic imagination and his disdain of anything that seemed parsimonious or petty which was disastrously reflected in his own private expenditure, we can indeed well believe him when he says that the course proposed 'was the most completely adverse that can be imagined to the natural turn and temper of his own mind'. However, he deals faithfully with 'an inheritance of absurdity' in a speech, which, considering the subject-matter, is extraordinary indeed. It will be generally conceded that an Empire losing the major part of its dependencies, millions of the human race alleged to be crying for vengeance against their oppressor, European civilisation menaced by an 'armed doctrine' proceeding from the chief European country, are topics which lend themselves more readily to eloquence than the unwieldiness of the King's Household, the mysterious methods of accounting in the Paymaster's Office, and the uselessness of the Board of Trade; but it does not matter to Burke. The principles which guided him are stated, more briefly and effectively than here, in a work in which, years later, he justified these reforming efforts.

Mere parsimony is not economy. It is separable in theory from it, and, in fact, it may, or may not, be a *part* of economy, according to circumstances. Expense, and great expense, may be an essential part in true economy. If parsimony were to be considered as one of the kinds of that virtue, there is, however, another and a higher economy. Economy is a distributive virtue, and consists not in saving but in selection. Parsimony requires no providence, no sagacity, no comparison, no judgement. Mere instinct, and that not of the noblest kind, may produce this false economy in perfection. The other economy has larger views. It demands a discriminating judgement, and a firm, sagacious mind.¹

All is fish that comes into Burke's net, and this is how he enforces the proposition that the royal residences are not merely expensive to maintain but uncomfortable to inhabit

Our palaces are vast inhospitable halls. There the bleak winds, there 'Boreas, and Eurus, and Caurus, and Argestes loud', howling through the vacant lobbies, and clattering the doors of deserted guard-rooms, appal the imagination, and conjure up the grim spectres of departed tyrants—the Saxon, the Norman, and the Dane; the stern Edwards and fierce Henries—who stalk from desolation to desolation, through the dreary vacuity and melancholy succession of chill and comfortless chambers. When this tumult subsides, a dead and still more frightful silence would reign in this desert, if every now and then the tacking of hammers did not announce that those constant attendants upon all courts in all ages, jobs, were still alive; for whose sake alone it is that any trace of ancient grandeur is suffered to remain. These palaces are a true emblem of some governments; the inhabitants are decayed, but the governors and magistrates still flourish. They put me in mind of *Old Sarum*, where the representatives, more in number than the constituents, only serve to inform us that this was once a place of trade, and sounding with 'the busy hum of men', though now you can only trace the streets by the

•¹ *Works*, v. 126-27.

colour of the corn, and its sole manufacture is in members of parliament

The eighteenth-century Board of Trade deserves a passing mention. The historian of the *Decline and Fall* had a seat there, his 'sincere and silent vote', as continually exercised in support of North, having been insufficient to provide him with anything better. It also harboured a gentleman called Soame Jenyns, who had employed his salaried leisure in inditing a treatise on the 'Origin of Evil', a treatise crushingly reviewed by Johnson in one of his most characteristic works. Gibbon genially acknowledged that he could never forget 'the delight with which that diffusive and ingenious orator Mr. Burke was heard, and even by those whose existence he proscribed'; but another member of the Board, one Mr. Eden, had none of the historian's sense of humour. In response to Burke's inquiry as to what the Board did, he explained in an aggrieved fashion that the records of its activities were available in two thousand three hundred folio volumes, an assertion with which the orator made some natural play. 'This Board, sir,' said Burke, 'has had both its original formation and its regeneration in a job. In a job it was conceived, and in a job its mother brought it forth. . . . This Board is a sort of temperate bed of influence, a sort of gently ripening hothouse, where eight Members of Parliament receive salaries of a thousand a year for a certain given time, in order to mature at a proper season in claims for two thousand, granted for doing nothing.' The province of Nova Scotia was, it appears, the 'favourite child of the Board. Good God, what sums the nursing of that ill-thriven, hard-visaged and ill-favoured

brat has cost to this wittol nation. Sir, this colony had stood us in a sum of not less than seven hundred thousand pounds.'

The abolition of the peccant Board, and a bad breakdown which over-exertion entailed on their author, were the only immediate results of these extensive proposals. Passing over subsequent debates, including that on Dunning's famous resolution that 'the influence of the Crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished', we must hasten on to the principal event of the year 1780. This was an event eminently calculated to intensify certain apprehensions which, unfounded though they seem to have been in the retrospect, some notable Whigs cherished during these years.

These apprehensions concerned, not merely the future of English political institutions, but something like the stability of society itself in this country. The Duke of Richmond, speaking quite seriously, gave considerations of this kind as his reason for prosecuting a claim to some property in France. Nor was this feeling confined to an aristocracy already dimly conscious that their day was beginning to pass, or to those who, like Burke, depended upon them. Philip Francis, a sufficiently cool observer whose acquaintance we shall make shortly, spoke of investing his money abroad for the same reason. The American war, with its extensions, was a bad business from every point of view, and was responsible for a great deal of vague uneasiness. The Wilkite riots, again, however largely they may have been due to sheer rowdyism and to the absence of police, had been no laughing matter. But they were as nothing compared to the Gordon riots. How it came about that a crazy fanatic was able

to work up popular hatred of Rome to such dire effect, of what elements exactly the resulting mobs were composed, are matters that appear never to have been really explained; but we are only concerned with the event. Burke, who had supported the concessions to Roman Catholics, was among those mentioned as hostile to the 'no Popery' cry he was advised, but refused, to leave London, and his house was threatened. He remained to see Roman Catholic chapels and houses lying at the mercy of a raging multitude; Newgate broken open; the Bank of England and the Pay Office attacked, the house of the Lord Chief Justice burned down, the King giving the word to fire when the magistrates hesitated; Lord North gazing from the roof of No. 10 Downing Street at a city on fire in six places; the bodies of the dead thrown into the Thames.

'If one could in decency laugh,' he wrote, 'must not one laugh to see what I saw: a boy of fifteen years at most, in Queen Street, mounted on a pent-house and demolishing a house with great zeal . . . children are plundering, at noon-day, the City of London!'

to which is prefixed the heading, 'June 7, 1780, in what was London'. The feelings may be imagined with which so imaginative a man as Burke surveyed the most appalling outbreak of mob-violence which London had witnessed for centuries. The spectre of anarchy, which now rose before his mental vision, was never to be allayed, and was to be evoked again in far more terrible guise by the most tremendous event in modern history.¹

¹ See, e.g., Burke's references to the Gordon riots in connection with the French Revolution on the occasion of the rupture between himself and Fox (*Collected Speeches*, iv. 36).

When the question arose of executing justice on the rioters Burke's humanity led him to fear that too many would be executed. He would have limited the examples to half a dozen.

Men [he observed] who see their lives respected and thought of value by others come to respect that gift of God themselves. To have compassion for oneself, or to care more or less for one's life, is a lesson to be learned just as every other ; and I believe it will be found, that conspiracies have been most common and most desperate when their punishment has been most extensive and most severe. . . I have even observed that the execution of one man fixest the attention and excites awe ; the execution of multitudes dissipates and weakens the effect , but men reason themselves into disapprobation and disgust , they compute more as they feel less ; and every severe act which does not appear to be necessary is sure to be offensive ¹

The political reactions of the Gordon riots were by no means negligible. They certainly discredited the moderate reforming movement which was finding expression in the county petitions, and, as is very probable, they stiffened Burke in his opposition to Parliamentary Reform. His indifference to all the existing anomalies in the franchise, his acquiescence in Cornwall's returning to Parliament nearly as many members as the whole of Scotland, his affection for Old Sarum provided that the representation of that eminently pastoral constituency was not actually put up to auction, weakened his influence with the more radical sections of his own party and have been a stumbling-block to posterity. None the less, his reasons are important and characteristic.² For the

¹ *Thoughts on the approaching Executions* (*Works*, v. 517)

² *Works*, i 259, and especially vi 144 sq, the substance of which is repeated in various places in the *Reflections on the French Revolu-*

corruption and disorders which attended the elections of those days he had indeed no direct remedy to propose. But, in view of their existence, he would have preferred 'by lessening the numbers to add to the weight and independency of our voters'. On the general question he denied, in 1782, that there was a widespread demand for a change, if he had seen any evidence of such a demand, he would certainly have yielded to it. But his objections were really rooted in his view of the nation as a whole of mutually related parts, interests, and classes, and, connected therewith, in a desire to preserve the independence of members from merely local and sectional influences. As to 'natural rights,' he says in effect, whatever rights may appertain to man as such, the right to political power is not among them. As regards the authority of the Constitution to claim obedience from the subject, this rests on 'prescription', and not on any theory. The House of Commons is a 'legislative body corporate', existing in virtue of the same prescriptive operation as the House of Lords or the prerogatives of the Crown. If the nation be considered as a collection of units, the representation is no doubt inadequate, but a nation is not a collection of units.

A nation is not an idea only of local extent, and individual momentary aggregation; but it is an idea of continuity, which extends in time as well as in numbers and in space. And this is a choice not only of one day, or one set of people, not a tumultuary or giddy choice; it is a deliberate election of ages and generations; it is a constitution made by what is ten thousand times better than

tion; e.g. ii. 458. See also, *First Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe* (iii 334) on the difference between 'actual' and 'virtual' representation.

choice; it is made by the peculiar circumstances, occasions, tempers, dispositions and moral, civil and social habitudes of the people, which disclose themselves only in a long space of time. It is a vestment, which accommodates itself to the body. Nor is prescription of government formed upon blind, unmeaning prejudices—for man is a most unwise and a most wise being. The individual is foolish, the multitude for the moment is foolish, when they act without deliberation, but the species is wise, and, when time is given to it, as a species it always acts right.¹

¹ *Works*, vi. 147

CHAPTER VI

BRISTOL SPEECHES—SECOND ROCKINGHAM ADMINISTRATION
—FALL OF COALITION GOVERNMENT—BURKE AND PITT

(1780-1784)

BURKE's reputation now stood high in most places except his own constituency. The Bristol merchants were not in a position to hear their eloquent representative in Parliament, and had no immoderate appetite for the political philosophy which he administered to them by letter. But they did want to see him sometimes, and, by the time that Parliament was dissolved in September 1780, they had not in fact seen him for four years. This, and other complaints of a kind especially liable to be urged by a commercial constituency at that date, he answered in one of the noblest of all his speeches, viz. that *At Bristol, previous to the election* (1780). This, his first *Apologia pro vita sua*, was thus made just midway in his public career, as the second, the *Letter to a Noble Lord*, was made soon after its conclusion. With all the force and dignity at his command, and with a restraint which in his later years he too often forgot, he defended himself against the charge of neglecting his constituents, and against further charges of supporting legislation which they held to be adverse to their

interests. This legislation concerned the relief of debtors, the abolition of some restrictions on Irish commerce, and the relief of Roman Catholics in England ; and the substance of Burke's defence has—apart as always from the incidental reflections accompanying it—lost most of its interest by reason of the triumph of the causes which he advocated. Public opinion was divided :

In such a discordancy of sentiments, it is better to look to the nature of things than to the humours of men. The very attempt towards pleasing everybody discovers a temper always flashy, and often false and insincere. Therefore, as I have proceeded straight onward in my conduct, so I will proceed in my account of those parts of it which have been most excepted to. But I must first beg leave just to hint to you, that we may suffer very great detriment by being open to every talker. It is not to be imagined, how much of service is lost from spirits full of activity, and full of energy, who are pressing, who are rushing forward, to great and capital objects, when you oblige them to be continually looking back. Whilst they are defending one service, they defraud you of an hundred. Applaud us when we run ; console us when we fall ; cheer us when we recover ; but let us pass on—for God's sake let us pass on.¹

The electors of Bristol must not expect perfection, but must look to the whole tenor of their member's conduct. (' Not to act thus is folly ; I had almost said it is impiety. He censures God who quarrels with the imperfections of man.') His canvass, he urged, had not been in Bristol, but ' it was in the House of Commons ; it was at the Council, it was at the Treasury ; it was at the Admiralty. I canvassed you through your affairs and not through your persons.'

¹ *Works*, ii 129.

The new Parliament, which Burke joined after a few months, included two extraordinary recruits, Pitt and Sheridan. Both joined the Opposition, and Pitt was soon to vie with Burke in his denunciation of the American war. Sheridan was, of course, Burke's own fellow-countryman, but the two Irishmen certainly did not love one another any the more for that, or for some superficial resemblance in their own circumstances. Both were political adventurers, using the word in no disparaging sense. Both contrived to keep up a good external show with no very visible means of support, but the popular dramatist had gone in for fashionable society, which Burke had never done. As a politician Sheridan had never been through the mill, and, for all his versatile and amazing powers, there had been nothing in his previous life to compensate for this deficiency. Success came to him too early; to see the House of Commons thrilled with admiration of his speeches, and the theatres ringing with applause of his plays, was enough to turn anyone's head, and one can only wonder that so volatile a man as Sheridan kept his head at all. Burke and Sheridan trod the same path for some years. An inherent divergence broke out at length between the thinker and the sentimentalist, but the two men stood side by side throughout what Burke regarded as the greatest effort of his life.

The position of affairs with which the new Parliament was faced was disquieting in the extreme. England was at war not only with America, but with France, Spain, and Holland. Burke at once showed himself more active even than usual. He attacked Rodney for his confiscation of private property in the island of St. Eustatius. He spoke also on a motion

for peace with America, but the continuance of the government was bound up with that of the war. In one of those lapses into the vernacular which have caused such pain to some of his critics, but, on this occasion, merely caused Lord North to roar with laughter, he emphasised the connection by a similitude which we must reluctantly suppress.¹ On November 25, 1781, London heard of the crowning disaster of the American war, the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown. North for once was utterly shaken—‘Oh God, it is all over.’ But George III was not of the temper to surrender easily, and the King’s speech showed no hint of yielding. Fox and Burke redoubled their invectives, and Cornwallis’ failure to secure provision for the American loyalists caused the latter to lose his self-control altogether. Burke demanded impeachment and Fox the scaffold for Lord North. The end had not yet come, but it was evidently imminent, and, after long and stricken years of opposition, the Whigs saw themselves in sight of power. Burke, who had more reason than anyone to desire the emoluments of office, now showed himself at his strongest and coolest. He felt, we may be sure, the incompatible elements that were working within his party, he probably doubted the impulsiveness of Fox, and he certainly shared the prevailing distrust of Shelburne—a distrust which, however it may be accounted for, is one of the dominating facts of the politics of the time. He uttered words of grave warning amid the clamorous exultation of his friends.

¹ *Collected Speeches*, ii. 276. The reference is to *Hudibras*, i. 285, 286, but Burke has altered the first line. For Burke’s explosion of feeling as to the loyalists see ii. 292.

It was on March 19, 1782, that the resignation of the government was somewhat suddenly announced. The night was bitterly cold, and North, the only member of the House who knew that there would be an early adjournment, had provided accordingly. Genial to the last, he passed through a crowd of his triumphant adversaries who were awaiting the arrival of their own carriages, with a ' Good night, gentlemen ; you see what it is to be in the secret ! '

The Whigs' turn had come at length, and the King's government had to be carried on by one or more of the groups which called themselves by that generic name. Two of the obvious men, Rockingham and Shelburne, differed on some vital questions touching American independence and the functions of the Crown in constitutional government. The King first tried Rockingham, then the more congenial Shelburne ; finally, after a good deal of negotiation, an arrangement was reached which suited the King exactly but augured ill for the stability of Whig government. Rockingham became First Lord of the Treasury and head of the government ; Shelburne became Secretary for Colonial and Irish affairs ; Fox became Foreign Secretary. Burke, to the disappointment of posterity much more apparently than of himself, was not given a place in the Cabinet, but the Paymastership of the Forces and a seat on the Privy Council. That this arrangement was due less to Whig exclusiveness than to a genuine opinion that he was not temperamentally fitted for high office admits of no reasonable doubt. Burke was indeed Burke, but we need not therefore blind ourselves to the fact that his judgement as to practical possibilities was often unreliable, and that, since he was always inclined to say

exactly what he thought, and to say it with considerable emphasis, he could be exceedingly indiscreet. It is in any case a matter upon which there can be no appeal from the verdict of men who had known him long and liked him well. The office assigned him was, as he joyfully informed William Burke in India, very well paid, and there was also a subordinate post for his son Richard. It was money that he needed most of all.

Burke might, indeed, have had a much larger sum than he actually allotted to himself. Although pledged to reforms, he might have pocketed some at any rate of the vast perquisites in the shape of interest on money in hand which nearly all his predecessors had enjoyed. But one of his first acts on taking office was to bring forward a new plan of Economical Reform. It was a less drastic scheme than its predecessor, for the Whigs now saw that it was one thing to propose and another to execute plans for public economy. However, it reduced, among other things, the personal emoluments of the Paymaster from sums amounting to about £23,000¹ a year to £4000 a year fixed, and the Paymaster's official residence speedily assumed a more austere tone than had distinguished it under Burke's predecessor. The deplorable Rigby had made it a place where the less reputable section of the King's political friends met to the accompaniment of much high living, and, as it is not irrelevant to add, Rigby left nearly half a million of money behind him when he died. In view of this, to inquire unfavourably into the efforts which Burke made from time to time to

¹ Prior, 218; a statement which does not appear to have been contradicted.

obtain offices of various kinds for himself and his relations, is surely the refinement of pedantry.¹

The most important measure carried by the second Rockingham government was the concession of legislative independence to Ireland, but with Burke's attitude to his native country we must deal subsequently. The war was meanwhile going better in its last phase; Eyre Coote was victorious in India, Eliot at Gibraltar, Rodney in the West Indies. When the news arrived of Rodney's victory, Burke refused to follow up his inquiry into the great sailor's action at St. Eustatius. But at home the government had fallen to quarrelling, especially as to the peace negotiations. Fox had just declared his intention to resign when Rockingham suddenly died (July 1, 1782). 'The death of Lord Rockingham,' wrote the unfriendly Horace Walpole, 'whom I cannot admire more than I did on the mere merit of being dead, has already produced great dissensions.' The step which Rockingham had just taken was indeed the very worst thing that could have happened to the Whigs. To Burke in particular it was an overwhelming blow. He was deeply attached to Rockingham personally, and remained on cordial terms with his heir, Earl Fitzwilliam. The financial aid that Rockingham had so generously afforded him necessarily ceased, and it is to money worries that the increasing irritability which he subsequently evinced must be in part attributed. He had also lost a political chief who, if personally rather feeble,

¹ He shortly afterwards appears to have tried to get the reversion of the lucrative sinecure known as the Clerkship to the Pells for his son. See Macknight, II 547. Macknight points out with perfect justice that Burke had never proposed to abolish all sinecure offices.

was congenial to himself in general outlook. It was on a far rasher spirit than Rockingham that the leadership was soon to devolve, and Burke, who knew Fox through and through, must, we may be certain, have entertained many unspoken apprehensions.

Nothing but dire necessity would, however, have induced the King to accept Fox. He sent for Shelburne; Pitt became Chancellor of the Exchequer at the age of twenty-three; Fox, Burke, and others, inspired by personal and political differences with Shelburne, resigned. Shelburne, weakened by this defection, had now to arrange terms of peace which proved to be, as historians seem agreed, tolerably satisfactory. However, the recognition of American independence seemed the end of England's greatness to many Englishmen, and the treaty failed to protect the interests of the American loyalists—a matter which Burke had much at heart. But Shelburne was not destined to enjoy power for many months; another combination in the kaleidoscopic scene was about to be effected. At the end of February 1783, to the astonishment of everyone, Fox joined North, whom he had lately been threatening with the scaffold; carried, in combination with him, a vote of censure on the peace; and ousted Shelburne. For some five months there was no government at all, but the King, finding of no avail his *ultima ratio* of threatening to retire to Hanover, was forced at length to accept the famous 'Coalition Government'.

The part played in this transaction by Burke, who now returned with great alacrity to the Pay Office, is not clear. But he seems to have approved, or at the least to have made no attempt to prevent, what was to

become a deplorable event, an awful warning, in the eyes alike of Whigs and Tories. How much of the virtuous indignation with which the Coalition has been visited is due to its intrinsic character, and how much to the fact that it did not in the event succeed, we may be dispensed, in a short life of Burke, from considering. The Coalition, whether or not a crime, was most certainly a blunder. The move made by Fox and his friends was, in their own eyes, immensely facilitated by personal liking for North and personal hatred of Shelburne ; but the public, who were not behind the scenes, could only see the obvious and equivocal fact that two leaders, lately at daggers drawn, had suddenly coalesced and obtained office.

What Burke privately thought of the whole matter we are nowhere explicitly informed, but his conscience was sensitive, and he may well have felt himself in a false position¹ What with this, and the calamity of Rockingham's death, he now showed himself for the first but not unfortunately for the last time in a thoroughly overwrought state. He also made a grave mistake in his administration of the Pay Office. Two senior officials, Powell and Bembridge by name, had been dismissed by Burke's predecessor on a well-founded charge of malversation. They had, however, rendered Burke great services in his reorganisation of that department, and, as he himself confessed in Parliament, had worked upon his feelings to such an extent that he was induced to reinstate them. No doubt he himself, as he protested again and again, thoroughly believed in their innocence, but no one

¹ Burke's parliamentary defence of the Coalition, so far as preserved, does not seem to ring true (*Collected Speeches*, II 384).

else did. The matter being brought up in the House of Commons, Burke defended his action in a speech which, for violence and irrelevance, would be hard to beat.¹ His enemies now had their opportunity of baiting him, and indeed party feeling had been exasperated to fury by the Coalition and its accompaniments.

The principal matter before the Government, as to which we shall have much more to say in the next chapter, was India. Fox's India Bill passed the House of Commons, as it was bound to have done, by a large majority. But it was unpopular in the country, and the King saw his chance. He caused it to be conveyed to the House of Lords that he would regard all who voted for the bill as his enemies. This step, however unconstitutional, was effective. Temporal peers remembered the fountain of honour, spiritual peers remembered their maker, in numbers sufficient to cause the rejection of the bill. The King straightway directed Fox and North to surrender their seals of office, and appointed Pitt First Lord of the Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer. Then followed what Johnson called 'the struggle between George III.'s sceptre and Mr. Fox's tongue'. Fox made the fatal mistake of not at once urging a dissolution, and, for all his wonderful skill in debate, showed himself no match in parliamentary strategy for the youthful Pitt. He, though in a minority and with all the orators against him, held on, and Fox's majority dwindled away. In a few weeks a representation to the King which Burke had prepared was carried by only one vote.

¹ *Collected Speeches*, ii. 392. Powell subsequently committed suicide, and Bembridge was fined and imprisoned. Burke did his best for the latter at the trial. For Burke's representation, see *Works*, ii. 249 sq.

Public opinion was veering round towards Pitt, who waited until the time seemed exactly opportune to appeal to the country (March 25, 1784). The result was overwhelmingly in his favour, and he entered on a tenure of power which was to be unbroken for seventeen years.

These debates heralded another struggle which was to last until the end of the century and beyond it, a struggle between the statesman who became the 'pilot who weathered the storm' and the attractive man of genius who was henceforth to expend his powers in a vocal and, for the time being, a fruitless opposition.

We, we have seen the intellectual race
Of giants stand, like Titans, face to face,
Athos and Ida, with a dashing sea
Of eloquence between . . .

were the words of a poet whose earliest memory was of the mighty contests of Pitt and Fox. It had become plain to demonstration that the Whigs, mainly if not entirely through their own fault, had been unable to provide the country with a stable government. This was now to be provided by a statesman who 're-created the Tory party by sloughing off the false tenets which had grown up around it';¹ who, as against an exclusive though not illiberal aristocracy, stood for as much political equality as seemed possible in the circumstances of the time; who, in commercial matters, was the pupil of Adam Smith; who was to discountenance political corruption as strongly as the Rockingham Whigs; and who was to lead the country in the path of peace and prosperity until the cataclysm came. In 1784, however, these things were still to be. Burke,

¹ Grant Robertson, *England under the Hanoverians*, p. 309.

at fifty-five, saw Pitt, at twenty-five, handle the most difficult parliamentary situations with a cool efficiency which was and has to this day remained unsurpassed, and which, considering his age, seemed inhuman. Burke, warm blooded, impetuous, often indiscreet with the indiscretion of exuberant genius, was repelled by Pitt's cold correctness, his wonderful self-control, and by the lack of generosity to opponents which was a real flaw in his character, and in which he offered such a contrast to Fox. If the young man was like this at twenty-five, what would he be like at sixty? ¹ Conscious of his own superior mentality and of Pitt's superior efficiency, Burke called Pitt the 'sublime of mediocrity', an absurd judgement enough if taken literally, but we can see what Burke meant. Pitt's sonorous eloquence, again, could no more be gainsaid than could the precocious excellence of his judgement, but Burke at this time seems to have doubted whether there was any real substance behind 'the premature and unnatural dexterity in the combination of words' which, as Coleridge puts it, Pitt had acquired from his father's training.

Some years were still to pass before the consequences of a European catastrophe were to change this and many other judgements. Burke himself was one day to owe to the King and to the all-powerful minister the pension which eased his last years, and to express the hope that, in the last resort, he could be found 'not fighting, that would be absurd, but dying by the side of Mr. Pitt'. However, the Whig party had been routed this time, completely and finally, and Burke could not love the minister who had profited by an

¹ Cf. letter in *Life of Sir Gilbert Elliot*, i 114.

illegitimate stretch of royal influence to rise upon its ruins. Unlike many candidates who at this election qualified for the title of 'Fox's Martyrs', he retained his seat for Malton, but his chance of office had vanished for ever.

Neither in his public nor his private life was Burke now happy. He had never uttered a word in public that could be construed into a complaint at his exclusion from the Whig cabinets, nor, indeed, does he ever seem to have minded it much¹. But he had made an injudicious speech in which he made no attempt to conceal his reluctance to leave the Pay Office, of which he sorely needed the emoluments². He was now beginning definitely to lose popularity in the House of Commons, and his reputation had not been enhanced by the affair of Powell and Bembridge. 'My parliamentary fervour,' Lord Sheffield had written in 1783, 'cannot hold out more than ten days longer. Thank God, Burke is quiet.' In his own party he now began to be regarded as an irritable and intractable colleague, who expected, as indeed he had every right to expect, that he should be consulted in everything, and was angry if his advice was not taken. As regards the ministerialists, Pitt could of course recognise Burke for what he was, and regarded him at this time as an extremely formidable opponent, more formidable even than Fox. But many of Pitt's followers did not share their leader's respect. They would first try and cough Burke down, and then interrupt him. 'I hope', one

¹ A stray remark in his correspondence has been quoted on the other side, but there does not seem much in it, and, if Burke had felt his exclusion strongly, we should almost certainly have heard more about it.

² *Parl Hist.*, xxiii 182.

of them would say with a pleasing frankness, 'the hon. gentleman does not mean to read that large bundle of papers and bore us with a long speech into the bargain,' and the hon. gentleman in question would look unutterable things, and threaten to speak for three hours. Mr. Burke would refer to 'eternal reason', Mr. Jenkinson (Lord Liverpool) would refer to 'common sense', and all the satisfaction that remained to Mr. Burke was the consciousness, abundantly justified as a rule, of seeing farther than anyone else.

Burke retained, no doubt, an influence over those best worth influencing of which nothing but his own occasional eccentricities ever deprived him. In circles where opinion was not dependent upon the vicissitudes of his parliamentary reputation he stood high, and his published speeches always had a wide circulation as pamphlets¹ In the midst of the Coalition crisis he was elected Lord Rector of the University of Glasgow (Nov. 1783), and his installation was splendidly attended. In private life he was beginning to show some signs of an asperity which he had hitherto reserved for the House of Commons, but this never went very far, and he continued to be a model country

¹ As regards the degree of correspondence between Burke's speeches as spoken and as published by himself, all the positive evidence available may be indicated by the following references: Gibbon, *Autobiography*, testifying to the 'general correctness' of Burke's published speeches; Charles Butler, *Reminiscences*, II. 117, who takes rather a different view; Bond, Introduction (p. xlii) to the Stationery Office edition of the Warren Hastings speeches. Having regard to their length and general character, Burke probably revised these last speeches more than most, and he did revise them a good deal. Judging by a comparison of random passages from the two versions of these speeches, and on the results of a general impression formed from various slight indications, I should say that all the more striking phrases and passages in Burke's speeches were delivered practically as published.

squire at Beaconsfield, and to move freely in London society. Above all, he retained the power of attracting younger men. Of these the most important to Burke himself was Dr. French Lawrence, a lawyer of repute, a minor politician, and a most faithful and active friend of Burke's to the end. There was also Sir Gilbert Elliot, afterwards Governor-General of India as Lord Minto, who entertained at this time views on the Indian question identical with Burke's own, and took a prominent part in the impeachment of Warren Hastings. A more intimate friend was William Windham. A scholar, an all-round sportsman, a man of fine manners and popular wherever he went, Windham appears to have made in these respects the same sort of impression as the late Mr. Alfred Lyttelton made on his contemporaries. An extremely diffident and morbidly scrupulous temperament, as evinced in his *Diary*, unfitted him for attaining the highest eminence in politics, but his career, begun about this time as Burke's disciple, was honourable and distinguished. Windham had something to endure at Burke's hands from time to time: 'I must endeavour', we find him writing on a later occasion, 'to obliterate from my mind the impression which passion so unreasonable and manners so rude would be apt to leave.' But he never, save for one brief period, wavered in his allegiance throughout all the storms which were to overtake his leader's later life.

The first and, on the whole, the least interesting stage of Burke's career had occupied more than half of his parliamentary life. It may be said to have ended with Pitt's accession to power, or, more accurately, with the final phase of the American War. We have

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seen him so far content as well as compelled to work mostly in response to the normal demands of his party, and not yet called upon to embrace larger causes in a manner that was to carry him above and beyond the immediate exigencies of any party programme. Even after he had become active on the vast fields which India and France were subsequently to afford him, he remained a keen if somewhat independent party man. He could not, as some of his admirers seem to wish, have been at the same time both in and out of active political life; the author of *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* would never have wished to form a party of one; nor, considering that he owed his seat in Parliament to the goodwill of a Whig chief, could he in any case have done so. He must certainly share the onus of such legitimate criticism as may be directed against a party which sometimes interpreted the first duty of an opposition in a manner that seems to us beyond all reason. In the Falkland Islands affair of 1771 the opposition, including Burke, adopted, in their eagerness to discredit the government, a course which, after thorough inquiry, has been severely censured by a modern historian,¹ and which might have led to a European war. Another striking instance is afforded by the maddening tactics with which the Whigs, again including Burke, added to the difficulties of Pitt on the Regency question of 1788; no modern opposition of the same character and calibre would have acted on such an occasion in quite the same way. But party politics were still in a comparatively immature stage; the rules of the game had not been fully evolved; and the system, or rather the want of it, must be blamed

¹ Winstanley, *op. cit.* p. 411 sq.

more than the men. Henceforward, and until the time of the French Revolution, Burke does not appear to such advantage as heretofore in ordinary political business. The men whom he had hitherto been opposing were, not excepting North, second-rate men. But the man whom he was henceforth to oppose was a very first-rate man. It is inevitable that some features of the Whig opposition to Pitt—and Burke had to act more or less with his party—should now appear to have been particularly unreasonable and factious; and there were various circumstances, disappointment, financial anxiety, occasional ill-health, which rendered Burke's general tone in the House of Commons increasingly acrimonious.

The general trend of Burke's thought, as manifested hitherto, is sufficiently plain. Observation, study, and reflection had convinced him that the English Constitution of his time, monarchical, but not predominantly monarchical, aristocratic, but not wholly aristocratic, provided the best form of government that was reasonably possible for the country as he saw it. It might work clumsily; '*mais il ne faut pas tout corriger*'. Rust, as Burke says somewhere, has its use; so far as the machine was actually unjust or palpably antiquated in its operation it must be reformed—but still, even if it creaked, it worked. That was something in the eyes of a thinker permeated by a conviction of the exceeding difficulty of the art of governing a complex society, and by a realisation of the slow process by which there had actually been achieved a settled government under which his fellow-countrymen seemed to be neither unprosperous nor unhappy. Burke's mind was far too imaginative, his philosophy

far too deep, to take the fact of government for granted. It never ceased to be a matter of wonder to him that, men being what they are, they could be got to live together in an ordered society, that 'the good old rule, the simple plan' had been, not without difficulty, at last superseded. No doubt the most undesirable continental despotism might suffice to protect the lives and the property of its subjects, but in England there was something more. The English Constitution, in its unhampered working, provided that public questions should be debated in assemblies which afforded a fair representation of those elements in the nation that were capable of forming an opinion upon such questions. It provided for free discussion and subsequent decision by a majority vote, a method which was so far from obviously recommending itself to the natural man that its achievement represented one of the triumphs of civilisation. This last cardinal feature had been endangered by the encroachment of another element in the same system, and it was to combating this encroachment that his efforts in the sphere of home politics had been mainly devoted. But the time when he was to vindicate, under entirely changed circumstances and with the eyes of England and Europe upon him, what he conceived to be the essence of the English tradition in society and politics was still some years distant.

It was in the American field that he had chiefly exhibited his distinctive characteristics,—a conviction of the inutility of *a priori* generalisations in politics; a suspicion of the effect, whether soporific or inflammatory, of political catchwords; an undogmatic attitude, in short, towards political questions.

This attitude was certainly liable to be obscured by the fervour of his temperament and by the energy of his utterance, but it was to accompany him in essentials up to the last phase of his life. There had also been quickened in him, as a result of the American contest, a hatred of anything that seemed like oppression, a keen sense of the existence and the character of other civilisations, and the most liberal conception of what should be the relation of an imperial power to subject peoples. These last qualities in particular were now to be displayed on a far larger scale, and in response to a far more clamant demand. Hitherto, Burke has been a statesman solely; in the scene which is now opening upon him, the prophet begins to gain upon the statesman. With his sudden realisation of India there begins the second of the three great chapters into which his public life is divisible.

CHAPTER VII

BURKE AND INDIA—THE EAST INDIA BILL AND THE NABOB
OF ARCOT—BURKE AND WARREN HASTINGS

(1783-1788)

'IF', wrote Burke in 1796, 'I had asked for a reward, which I have never done, it would be for the sixteen years I laboured with the most assiduity and met with the least success—I mean in the affairs of India. Others may praise it only for the intention; in that, surely, they are not mistaken.' His efforts, prolonged and gigantic though they were, have only too little surface attraction. For all that belongs to romance we must go to India itself; to the record which tells of how a few factories grew, within so short a time, into an Empire. Burke's concern lay with the shadows that chequer, in its earlier scenes, that epic story of courage, endurance, and policy, with instances of rapine and oppression abroad, and with governmental negligence at home. His endeavours lie buried in masses of dead print, in official reports, in parliamentary debates, in the enormous records of the most important State Trial of modern times.

When the loud cry of trampled Hindostan
Arose to Heaven in her appeal from man,
His was the thunder, his the avenging rod,
The wrath, the delegated voice of God !

Which shook the nations through his lips, and blazed
Till vanquished senates trembled as they praised.

Byron's lines might more worthily have been applied to Burke than to the theatrical declaimer to whom they were actually dedicated. No poet has celebrated either Burke's eloquence or the infinite toil on which it was based. But it was he, and not Sheridan, who haled the mighty Governor-General before the highest tribunal in the land and, almost single-handed, kept the eyes of Parliament and the nation fixed for years upon him. What was perhaps Burke's greatest practical achievement seems a dubious achievement now. He was mistaken in his estimate of Warren Hastings and of the general tendency of Warren Hastings' administration. But, as is not always remembered, his efforts on behalf of India were by no means confined to the famous impeachment. As must needs be admitted by Hastings' strongest advocates, there was only too much in the history of the British in India up to the very end of the eighteenth century which demanded that the principles upon which British dependencies have since been governed should be upheld, as they were upheld, with all the resources of Burke's mind and all the splendour of his eloquence. To have worked for the recognition of these principles to an extent, to have proclaimed them with a power, which was not even remotely approached by any other English statesman of his time, remain Burke's most enduring titles to an other than literary fame.

From the establishment of the East India Company until some time after Clive had laid the foundation of our rule in the East, such intervention as the home

government had undertaken in the affairs of India had been prompted by motives solely financial. In 1767 an Act of Parliament tapped a hitherto unexplored source of revenue by allowing the Company to retain its territorial acquisitions in return for a large money payment to the Treasury, thus asserting a vague claim over these territories. Partly owing to this, the Company subsequently fell into financial difficulties, and there followed various transactions between them and the government. From that time on Parliament was forced to intervene in the condition of affairs created by the anomalous position of the Company in India and by its anomalous relations to the home government. Its large territories were held nominally by way of grants from the Mogul, and nominally in dependence upon him, but the position had never been defined or adjusted by English law. The very worst period of the Company's rule was over by the time, about 1780, that Burke's real exertions began, but India, especially Southern India, was still the El Dorado of some very dubious military and commercial adventurers. Burke's attention had been early directed to India in the ordinary way of business. As regards Clive, he had voted, it is interesting to note, with the majority of the House who passed the well-known and just resolution in virtue of which Clive's great services to his country were set off against all incidental irregularities. He had spoken, warmly as was his habit, on the financial arrangements between the government and the Company, but his feelings were certainly not yet engaged on behalf of the inhabitants of India. We find him inveighing against any attempt to violate

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the sanctity of charters, perpetually apprehensive of the power of the Crown, and not, apparently, averse from making party capital out of various matters of Indian business as they arose. He had always defended the Company from the exactions of the government, and had been inclined to charge the malpractices of some of the Company's servants on the government's failure to provide any effective means of control. In 1772 Colonel Barré stated in the House of Commons that 'more cruelties were practised in that country than even in Mexico'; but Burke evidently suspected exaggeration, and refused to blame the Company rather than the government. As late as March 1780 we find him demanding friendly treatment for the Company as 'our best commercial allies'. But a sudden and most thorough-going conversion was then at hand, a conversion from which was to spring the master passion of a large part of Burke's life.¹

North's Regulating Act of 1773 marks an important and decisive intervention of the English government in India · separating, as it did, the judicial from the executive functions of the Company's system; giving the Governor of Bengal, Warren Hastings, the title of Governor-General; providing that he should be 'assisted' by a Council of four, in which he was to have a casting vote only in the case of an equal division of opinion; and giving the Governor-General and Council an ill-defined superintending authority over the other presidencies. It was severely criticised by Burke from various constitutional and other points of

¹ See e.g. *Collected Speeches*, i 121; II. 151, 229. It is true that Burke was dealing with different aspects of the situation in the latter two speeches delivered in 1780 and 1781 respectively, but the contrast in tone is none the less striking

view, and, though it was honestly meant, it was an ill-advised scheme in some points, as the sequel showed. Burke's suspicions, even at this time, had been directed against Warren Hastings. In the debates occasioned by North's Act, he avowed his belief that Hastings was guilty of everything charged against the Company.¹

It accordingly happened that three men, appointed Members of Council for Bengal under North's Act, sailed for Calcutta in a ship which others besides the Lord Chancellor who afterwards came to preside over the greater part of Hastings' trial have wished had gone to the bottom of the sea. There was Colonel Monson, who was called by Burke 'one of the best of men', and perhaps he was. There was also General Clavering, who in death was stated by the same authority to have been 'bedewed with the tears of the Court of Directors', but in life had been chiefly remarkable for an unusual pugnacity, having wished to fight the Duke of Richmond on an Indian question before ever he set foot in India, having fought another member of the Council when he had got there, and having nearly fought the Governor-General himself. The third man, whose post had been offered to and declined by Burke, merits particular notice in any biography of the latter. Philip Francis, the most likely candidate for the dubious distinction of having written the *Letters of Junius*, had had some official experience, but had not done anything particular to

¹ Macknight, ii 28, whose reference is to the Cavendish Debates, Cavendish MSS Bibl Egerton, vol 250, p. 208. This gives a very early date for Burke's suspicions of Hastings, a date when Francis had not set foot in India, and when Burke was apparently only very slightly acquainted with him. To Macknight, it should be added, belongs the credit of having been the first to examine the MSS in question for the purpose of Burke's biography.

distinguish himself before receiving this important and lucrative appointment. The authors of Francis's memoirs, an interesting book which appeared some years after Macaulay's essay on Hastings, expressly confirm Macaulay's estimate of his character. He was clearly a man of very great ability in affairs, master of a concise and vigorous style which Burke praised for its freedom from 'gummy flesh', personally incorruptible at a time when and in a place where that virtue was none too common, and, as he showed when he went out of his way to offend Pitt at the outset of his subsequent parliamentary career, fearing nobody. But he was extraordinarily vindictive, liable, as someone said of St. Just, to confound the triumph of his passions with that of his principles, and, whether Junius or not, he was undoubtedly a virulent anonymous libeller. He set out for India with all the zeal of an *a priori* reformer, but, as should not be forgotten, his opposition to Hastings' policy was rooted in a principle. As against the Governor-General, he had a keen sense of the impossible character of a situation in which the sovereignty of the Mogul had been virtually superseded and nothing except the rule of the Company's servants had been put in its place. He desired that the sovereignty of the British Crown should be formally proclaimed over the provinces of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, and, as may be added, that the Viceroy there-over should be himself.

It is a famous story which begins with the landing of Francis, Clavering, and Monson at Calcutta in October 1774. They were received, with courtesy that they thought insufficient, by the Governor-General, and also by the remaining member of Council, Barwell

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by name, who was genially described by Francis as having 'all the bad qualities common to this climate and country, of which he is in every sense a native'. How the new members of Council proceeded straight-way to inquire into the business of the Rohilla War; how, headed by Francis, they set about a course of resistance to Hastings which would have driven any other man to resign, and which served during about two years rather to embarrass administration than to introduce any sort of reform; how, owing to the death of two of them, Hastings regained supremacy; how Nuncomar was hanged; how Francis challenged Hastings, was wounded by him, and returned home; how Eyre Coote and Hastings saved our power in India from imminent peril at the hands of Hyder Ali; how Hastings was driven to replenish the depleted treasury of the Company by exactions from Cheyt Singh, the 'rajah' of Benares, and from the 'Begums of Oude'; are not they written in the most enthralling piece of historical narrative in the language? ¹

Much, meanwhile, was happening in England; and, in particular, Burke was discovering India. As we have seen, he had so far been concerned with India solely from the side of home politics, and, what was always the main thing with him, his feelings had not yet been stirred on behalf of the inhabitants of India. It was not primarily to Warren Hastings and Bengal but to Madras ² that his attention was called by William Burke, who was concerned in the affairs of Madras

¹ The corrections which Macaulay's *Essay on Warren Hastings* has been found to need are embodied in Mr F. C. Montague's edition of the *Essays*, as well as in various well-known editions for school and college use.

² Burke memorialised the government as to Madras in 1780 · see *Corr.*, II. 390.

and was probably not in himself an unimpeachable witness. But there is no doubt whatever that the internal state of that Presidency between the years 1770 and 1781 was appalling, and, as we shall see, it had also been the scene of some very discreditable transactions with a native ruler. Within that period two governors had been dismissed by the Company: one had been suspended by Hastings; another, Lord Pigott, had attempted to deal drastically with the malpractices of his subordinates, but had been thrust by them into the confinement of which he died. Burke knew, of course, that the Governor-General at Calcutta, in spite of his nominal superintending authority, could exercise no effective control over a gang of scoundrels who had reduced Madras to anarchy; but it is not surprising that, when he came to inquire more particularly into the situation in Bengal and the neighbouring states, he should have approached it with a disposition to believe the worst.

Not only had Burke been discovering India, and discovering it, as it is important to remark, in what was certainly its worst part, but Francis was now about to discover Burke. The directors had been continuing, according to their custom, to despatch letters which strictly enjoined their servants in India to refuse 'presents' from natives, and to abstain from aggressive warfare. As was said by one of the speakers in the debates on Fox's bill, these epistles 'inculcated the finest system of ethics, policy, and humanity', but the expression of these sentiments was combined with a natural appetite for dividends. Considering the anomalous position of the Governor-General, the difficulty of distinguishing between aggressive and defensive

warfare in the circumstances of India at the time, and, also, the character of some of the Company's servants, it is not surprising that complaints of maladministration had not diminished in consequence of the unsatisfactory settlement which had been provided by Lord North. It was not unnatural that some who read the director's model despatches and contrasted them with what appeared to be actually happening on the spot should have been inclined to attribute to a tyrannical and unscrupulous Governor-General much of what was really due to a radically vicious system.

A year or two before Francis carried a baffled ambition and a fierce hatred back to England the question of renewing the Company's charter had come up for consideration¹ Two committees of the House of Commons, of a non-party character, were appointed in 1781 to inquire into the administration of justice in Bengal, the causes of the war in which Hyder Ali invaded the Carnatic, and various other matters. Dundas was chairman of one of these committees (a 'Committee of Secrecy'), and Burke was the moving spirit of the other (a 'Select Committee'). America and economical reform being now, practically speaking, past and done with, Burke was free to devote all his faculties to India. India itself he was never to see, but everything that could conceivably be learned about

¹ It may be useful to give some dates to show the sequence of events: 1780, Burke active in affairs of Madras; 1781 (early), parliamentary committees appointed, Burke still speaks of Hastings in a judicial tone (*Corr.*, iii. 408), (end) Francis returns; 1782 (March), second Rockingham administration, (May) House of Commons on report of committees demand Hastings' recall, Fox's and Pitt's India Bills divert general attention from Hastings until 1785 (June), when Hastings returns and Burke renews the attack.

India from printed sources he learned. The amount of toil which he was henceforth to devote to that subject is enormous, incalculable. Bales of official correspondence, of pamphlets, folio volumes of reports, every accessible work bearing on the history and geography of India, so far from choking his assimilative powers, served to exercise his mind, to fire his imagination, and, most important, to widen his sympathies. As regards the results of these labours, it has been calculated that, from first to last, the whole of Burke's Indian speeches and writings would, if fully collected, fill five volumes in addition to the seven which they now occupy in the old octavo edition of his works.

The House of Commons committees were meanwhile producing numerous reports from 1781 onwards, two of which were written by Burke, and may be found in his works. 'I was the acorn, he was the oak,' said Francis with special reference to one of them,¹ and the report in question certainly appears to do credit to Francis's statesmanship as well as to Burke's mastery over a mass of repellent material. The House of Commons, after consideration of some of these reports, resolved to 'convey an entire conviction to the minds of the native princes' that the British government would not countenance aggressive warfare against them. They demanded the recall of Hastings and of another high official, a demand with which the directors refused to comply. That Francis, who was now at home and had been ready with plenty of evidence, exercised considerable influence on these committees is certain; exactly how much, it is hard to say. Other

¹ Francis's *Memoirs*, II 288. The report is that at the beginning of the fourth volume of Burke's works.

witnesses were examined, and it seems only reasonable to conclude that bodies of this kind, however ignorant of India, included some men who could take Francis's measure and make allowance accordingly.

It would be a mistake to regard, as has sometimes been done, the association of Francis and Burke as an ascendancy gained by a practical and none too scrupulous man over the enthusiasm of a visionary. Burke was not a visionary, and his temperament, to put it mildly, was not of the malleable kind. With a man of Burke's magnitude, the influence was bound to have been reciprocal; Francis always acknowledged this;¹ and moreover, he found himself shaken off by Burke quickly enough as soon as the French Revolution caused numerous and drastic changes in personal estimates. What Francis actually did was to revive and to intensify certain suspicions that, as we have seen, Burke had already conceived as to Warren Hastings. That Hastings had committed some irregularities is a fact; their actual extent and character are debatable even now, and were far more debatable then; but, on any estimate, they supplied a doubtful precedent for future administration. They blinded Burke both to the greatness of the man himself and to the great and durable quality of his total achievement on behalf of India. He had, he said, sufficient of 'coarse, vulgar equity' to allow of some incidental misdeeds being cancelled by the general tenor of a man's conduct, but he could not regard Hastings' case in that light.² The more he read, the more he heard,

¹ See Sir Gilbert Elliot's *Life*, ii. 412

² *Corr.*, iii. 38. As regards the transactions in question, all modern authorities hold that Hastings ought not to have been impeached, but cf. the view of Mr. P. E. Roberts (*Hist. Geog. of*

the more he reflected, the hotter grew his zeal against the East India Company and their great servant. It became at length something which burned into his brain and robbed him of peace ; a *saeva indignatio* akin to that which shook Swift when writing the 'Modest Proposal', which shook Voltaire when pleading the cause of the Calas.

The work of the committees above mentioned prepared the way for a real attempt to place the government of India on a satisfactory footing. As soon as the Coalition government came into power, Fox and Burke went full tilt at the Company. Fox's East India Bill (or rather Bills, there were two) was probably inspired by Burke, and it was at any rate drafted from his instructions. It certainly had the merit of being thoroughgoing. Broadly speaking, it deprived the Company of all political, administrative, and patronage powers, which it transferred to a body of commissioners. These proposals had some good features which were incorporated into Pitt's subsequent scheme under which India was to be governed until 1858. But Fox was ill-advised enough to nominate his commissioners, none of whom had any acquaintance with India, entirely from the ranks of the Coalition, and it was also against precedent that such officers should be nominated by Parliament and not by the Crown. No more sinister intention need be attributed to him than, probably, a desire to provide for numerous and

British India,¹ xviii) with that of Mr. Vincent Smith (*Oxford Hist. of India*, p. 537 sq.). Mr. Roberts, who holds that the modern reaction in favour of Hastings has been carried too far, points out that almost all the older school of Indian historians, including some who would naturally have sympathised with the man on the spot, blame in temperate terms some parts of Hastings' policy.

clamorous followers, but this action was the first nail in the coffin of his bill.

Burke, who was thoroughly on his mettle, supported Fox's proposals in the fourth of the parliamentary speeches which he published himself, that on *Mr. Fox's East India Bill* (December 1, 1783). He began by a consideration of the nature of charters in general, and a justification of drastic dealing with that of the East India Company. The only conditions which could justify the violation of existing chartered rights on the ground of abuse were 'that the object affected by the abuse should be great and important, that the abuse should be a great abuse, that it should be habitual and not accidental, that it should be utterly incurable in the body as it stood constituted'. As judged by all these canons, the Company had forfeited their charter.

Burke also had to communicate to his audience something of what he himself conceived the India to be, for which it was the bill's purpose to provide a new 'Magna Charta'—something of the mental picture which he had himself formed of the strange and remote scenes on which he had so long been brooding. He had never travelled farther afield than France; he had nothing in his own experience that was in the least likely to guide him through the actual realities of an alien civilisation, and he had an imagination that revelled in the gorgeous and the sublime. It is not accordingly surprising that his own picture of India, however informed with all the knowledge that books could give him, should have been, as no doubt it was, partly a fancy picture; that he should have bathed in a deceptive radiance 'an ancient and venerable priest-

hood, the depository of their laws, learning, and history, the guides of the people whilst living and their consolation in death ; a nobility of great antiquity and renown ; a multitude of cities, not exceeded in population and trade by those of the first class in Europe ; millions of ingenious manufacturers and mechanics ; millions of the most diligent, and not the least intelligent, tillers of the earth ; . . . the vast mass, composed of so many orders and classes of men, infinitely diversified by manners, by religion, by hereditary employment, through all their possible combinations ' As regards surface resemblance, the nearest parallel that he could find was the Empire : our immediate possessions might compare with the Austrian dominions ; the Nabob of Oude with the King of Prussia ; the Nabob of Arcot with the Elector of Saxony ; the ' Polygars and the northern Zemindars ' with the ' princes, dukes, counts, marquises, and bishops of the empire '. That Burke adopted too favourable a view of the condition of India before the advent of the West seems generally admitted. But his immediate concern lay with the condition of India in his own day, with individual acts of extortion and oppression committed, against the Company's orders, by some of the Company's servants. He was also alive to the first disastrous effects of an economic policy which, however legitimate according to the idea of the time, did much to convert India from a country that was partly a manufacturing country to one that was productive solely of raw material. How far, if at all, exaggerated the terrible indictment may be that is contained in the following famous passage it is for historians of India to say. But, apart from its

intrinsic power, no more lively illustration could well be given of what has since been accomplished, partly through Burke's influence, in the country which he served with an absolute devotion.

The Tartar invasion was mischievous ; but it is our protection that destroys India. It was their enmity, but it is our friendship. Our conquest there, after twenty years, is as crude as it was the first day. The natives scarcely know what it is to see the grey head of an Englishman. Young men (boys almost) govern there, without society and without sympathy with the natives. They have no more social habits with the people, than if they still resided in England ; nor, indeed, any species of intercourse but that which is necessary to making a sudden fortune, with a view to a remote settlement. Animated with all the avarice of age, and all the impetuosity of youth,¹ they roll in one after another ; wave after wave ; and there is nothing before the eyes of the natives but an endless, hopeless prospect of new flights of birds of prey and passage, with appetites continually renewing for a food that is continually wasting. Every rupee of profit made by an Englishman is lost for ever to India. With us are no retributory superstitions, by which a foundation of charity compensates, through ages, to the poor, for the rapine and injustice of a day. With us no pride erects stately monuments which repair the mischiefs which pride had produced, and which adorn a country out of its own spoils. England has erected no churches, no hospitals,² no palaces, no schools ; England has built no bridges, made no highroads, cut no navigations, dug out no reservoirs. Every other conqueror of every other description has left some monument, either of state or beneficence, behind him. Were we to be driven out of India this day, nothing would remain, to tell that it had been possessed during the inglorious period of our dominion, by anything better than the ourang-outang or the Tiger.

¹ Scott has sketched the type in Tom Hillary of *The Surgeon's Daughter*.

² 'The paltry foundation at Calcutta is scarcely worth naming as an exception'—Burke's note.

There is nothing in the boys we send to India worse than in the boys whom we are whipping at school, or that we see trailing a pike or bending over a desk at home. But . . . English youth in India drink the intoxicating draught of authority and dominion before their heads are able to bear it. . . . Their prey is lodged in England, and the cries of India are given to seas and winds to be blown about, in every breaking up of the monsoon, over a remote and unhearing ocean.

In India all the vices operate by which sudden fortune is acquired ; in England are often displayed by the same persons the virtues which dispense hereditary wealth. Arrived in England, the destroyers of the nobility and gentry of a whole kingdom will find the best company in this nation, at a board of elegance and hospitality. Here the manufacturer and husbandman will bless the just and punctual hand that in India has torn the cloth from the loom, or wrested the scanty portion of rice and salt from the peasant of Bengal, or wrung from him the very opium in which he forgot his oppressions and his oppressor. They marry into your families ; they enter into your senate ; they ease your estates by loans , they raise their value by demand ; they cherish and protect your relations which lie heavy on your patronage ; and there is scarcely a house in the kingdom that does not feel some concern and interest, that makes all reform of our Eastern government appear officious and disgusting, and, on the whole, a most discouraging attempt. In such an attempt you hurt those who are able to return kindness, or to resent injury. If you succeed, you save those who cannot so much as give you thanks. All these things show the difficulty of the work we have on hand : but they show its necessity too.¹

The administration of Warren Hastings is bitterly attacked, and at considerable length. Noticing the political objections which would be certain to be raised against the bill (‘ this objection against party is a party objection ’), Burke then concludes with a

¹ *Works*, II. 194.

panegyric on Fox, a panegyric charged with reminiscence of imperial Rome and the eloquence of her greatest orator.

He is traduced and abused for his supposed motives. He will remember that obloquy is a necessary ingredient in the composition of all true glory : he will remember that it was not only in the Roman customs, but it is in the nature and constitution of things, that calumny and abuse are essential parts of triumph. These thoughts will support a mind which only exists for honour under the burden of temporary reproach. He is doing, indeed, a great good ; such as rarely falls to the lot, and almost as rarely coincides with the desires, of any man. Let him use his time. Let him give the whole length of the reins to his benevolence. He is now on a great eminence, where the eyes of mankind are turned to him. He may live long, he may do much. But here is the summit. He never can exceed what he does this day.

He has faults ; but they are faults that, though they may in a small degree tarnish the lustre, and sometimes impede the march of his abilities, have nothing in them to extinguish the fire of so great virtues. In those faults, there is no mixture of deceit, of hypocrisy, of pride, of ferocity, of complexional despotism, or want of feeling for the distresses of mankind. His are faults which might exist in a descendant of Henry the Fourth of France, as they did exist in that father of his country. Henry the Fourth wished that he might live to see a fowl in the pot of every peasant in his kingdom. That sentiment of homely benevolence was worth all the splendid sayings that are recorded of kings. But he wished perhaps for more than could be obtained, and the goodness of the man exceeded the power of the king. But this gentleman, a subject, may this day say this at least, with truth, that he secures the rice in his pot to every man in India. A poet of antiquity thought it one of the first distinctions to a prince whom he meant to celebrate that through a long succession of generations he had been the progenitor of an able and virtuous citizen, who by force of the arts of peace had corrected

governments of oppression, and suppressed wars of rapine.

*Indole proh quanta iuvenis, quantumque daturus
Ausoniae populis ventura in saecula civem
Ille super Gangem, super exauditus et Indos,
Implebit terras voce ; et furialia bella
Fulmine compescet linguae*¹

This was what was said of the predecessor of the only person to whose eloquence it does not wrong that of the mover of this bill to be compared. But the Ganges and the Indus are the patrimony of the fame of my honourable friend, and not of Cicero.

North, sagacious as ever, had warned the enthusiastic authors of these proposals that they were asking for trouble, but they paid no heed. Fox is said to have acknowledged that the bill received its severest blow from a clever caricature of Sayer's representing Carlo Khan making a triumphal entry into Leadenhall Street, mounted on the back of North in the guise of an elephant, and accompanied by Burke as a trumpeter.² The opposition had no word to say as to the interests of India itself, interests which Fox and Burke had emphasised in the preamble to the bill.

¹ I may perhaps be permitted to borrow the version of these lines contained in Mr. Hughes' *Selections from Burke*, p. 187 'Ah, of how fair a nature is he, this youth, and how goodly a gift shall he make for ages to come to the peoples of Ausonia in their great countryman : whose voice, ringing beyond Ganges and Ind, shall fill all lands, and the lightning of his tongue shall subdue the frenzy of war' The lines (Silius Italicus, *Punica*, viii. 406) refer to Servius Tullius and are prophetic of his supposed descendant, Cicero Fox's descent from Henry IV. of France lay through the Duke of Richmond, his mother's father, and Charles II.

² This cartoon is reproduced in Wright's *Caricature History of the Georges*, which contains several caricatures of Burke at various periods of his life In his earlier years he was often represented as a Jesuit, but this was changed after 1790 A caricature of that time by Gillray ('Smelling a rat') shows a gigantic nose and spectacles, with a pair of hands holding a crown and a cross, startling the guilty lucubrations of Dr. Price

Fox was accused of attempting to engross patronage and make himself independent of the Crown ; ' Our charter is in danger. Look to your own ', was a cry which rallied many obstructive interests to the defence of the greatest existing corporation. The King, as we have seen, saw his chance, and the Coalition was broken.

Passing over Burke's very natural, if, as it now seems, rather unreasonably violent opposition to Pitt's East India Bill, we must hasten to an important occasion on which he again attempted to intervene in the affairs of Madras. What the internal condition of the Presidency was during these years we have seen. Its affairs had also become inextricably involved with the series of financial scandals known as the Nabob of Arcot's debts. The details of this business, though they long exercised the minds of statesmen and gave rise to a Board of Commissioners whose duties lasted not far short of half a century, are now happily forgotten. Mahomet Ali, the Nabob in question, had been desirous of extending his dominions and his prestige especially at the expense of his neighbour, the Rajah of Tanjore. This design could only be accomplished with the aid, or at any rate with the countenance, of the Madras government, but the Company had forbidden its servants to assist in enterprises of this kind, as well as to accept ' presents ' from native rulers. But a way had, it appeared, been found round these prohibitions by a past master of intrigue acting in concert with a knot of men ' with the avarice of age and the impetuosity of youth '. There was every reason to suspect that Mahomet Ali had been for some years acting in collusion with some

of the Company's servants in Madras. Sums were certainly lent to the Nabob at a scandalously usurious rate of interest and secured on the revenues of the Carnatic, more than that, it seemed very probable that, in many cases, no money had really passed, and that the debts which the Nabob acknowledged were fictitious. In any case, the fact remained that, at a time when the Company was in notorious financial difficulties, some British subjects appeared as creditors to a native ruler for sums which, with the accumulation of many years' compound interest, amounted to nearly three million pounds. It was also the fact that the Court of Directors, who had been charged by Pitt with inquiry into the matter, had found that these debts were most unsatisfactorily accounted for.

Burke, who had been studying the whole position for some years with his accustomed thoroughness, strongly opposed the proposal of the government that these debts, or most of them, should be liquidated by way of assignment from the revenues of a province which had been exhausted by recent wars. Indian financial affairs were not a thrilling topic, and it had been a weary debate on the evening of February 28, 1785. Late in its course, Burke rose to support a motion against the government's decision to acknowledge the Nabob of Arcot's private debts to Europeans and to charge them on the revenues of the Carnatic. The speech which he delivered is intrinsically perhaps the finest, and is certainly the most characteristic and extraordinary of all his speeches; but its subject matter is such that it is now readable only in selections. His purpose was to prove, by a review of their history and character, that the debts

were the result of corruption and collusion as aforesaid, to display the *modus operandi* of the Nabob's creditors, and, by way of illustrating the results of a long course of tortuous policy, to bring home to an audience mostly ignorant or apathetic what warfare and famine in India really meant.

Burke's opening illustrates what Hazlitt calls his habit 'of running away with and from a subject at the same time'. An exhortation to the House to apply its attention seriously to the subject of India, to view our Empire as a 'connected whole', to 'stretch and expand our minds to the compass of the object'; a reminder that wrongs committed in India are the same as wrongs committed in England; a discussion of the parsimonious character of Pitt's financial policy at home as contrasted with his too ready abandonment of a vast sum from Indian revenue into private and most questionable hands: these topics were enforced with every element of power and impressiveness upon an audience who, at nine or ten at night, were presumably anxious chiefly to get to the point and get to it as quickly as possible. The orator then subjects the origin and character of the debts in question to a long scrutiny, and does so with a fire and an animation that, considering the subject-matter, are astonishing. Twenty millions of money, he calculated, had been extracted from the Carnatic alone between 1760 and 1780. If we imagine an extremely complicated commercial case; counsel leading the jury through the devious burrowings of a fraudulent company promoter; if we magnify the scale to cover the interlocked financial and political relations of the Company, the Company's servants,

the Madras Government, the Nabob of Arcot and the Rajah of Tanjore, we shall have some idea of the argumentative foundation of the speech. Starting from this foundation Burke proceeds, after his manner, to translate the paper records of financial and political intrigues into terms of the human action and suffering in which they actually issued. We have, accordingly, Hyder Ali and his cavalry descending into the plains of the Carnatic, an invasion of which Burke does not appear to have greatly exaggerated the character or the results. The description¹ could only have emanated from a Miltonic imagination, inspired by a catastrophe where

No light, but rather darkness visible
Served only to discover scenes of woe,

a catastrophe of which the horror seemed none the less to contain some elements of a retributive justice.

When at length Hyder Ali found that he had to do with men who either would sign no convention, or whom no treaty and no signature could bind, and who were the determined enemies of human intercourse itself, he decreed to make the country possessed by these incorrigible and predestinated criminals a memorable example to mankind. He resolved in the gloomy recesses of a mind capacious of such things, to leave the whole Carnatic an everlasting monument of vengeance, and to put perpetual desolation as a barrier between him and those against whom the faith which holds the moral elements of the world together was no protection. He became at length so confident of his force, so collected in his might, that he made no secret whatsoever of his dreadful resolution. Having terminated

¹ Its basis is to be found in a passage from a despatch of Lord Macartney's printed as an appendix to the published speech—*Works*, III. 202. Burke had employed elsewhere the metaphor which he now amplifies, Saladin 'hung, like a continual tempest, ready to burst over the Christian army.' *Abridgement of English History*, *Works*, VI. 379.

his disputes with every enemy, and every rival, who buried their mutual animosities in their common detestation against the creditors of the Nabob of Arcot, he drew from every quarter whatever a savage ferocity could add to his new rudiments in the arts of destruction; and compounding all the materials of fury, havoc, and desolation into one black cloud, he hung for a while on the declivities of the mountains. Whilst the authors of all these evils were idly and stupidly gazing on this menacing meteor, which blackened all their horizon, it suddenly burst, and poured down the whole of its contents upon the plains of the Carnatic. Then ensued a scene of woe, the like of which no eye had seen, no heart conceived, and which no tongue can adequately tell. All the horrors of war before known or heard of, were mercy to that new havoc. A storm of universal fire blasted every field, consumed every house, destroyed every temple. The miserable inhabitants flying from their flaming villages, in part were slaughtered; others, without regard to sex, to age, to the respect of rank, or sacredness of function, fathers torn from children, husbands from wives, enveloped in a whirlwind of cavalry and amidst the goading spears of drivers, and the trampling of pursuing horses, were swept into captivity in an unknown and hostile land. Those who were able to evade this tempest fled to the walled cities. But escaping from fire, sword, and exile, they fell into the jaws of famine.

The alms of the settlement, in this dreadful exigency, were certainly liberal; and all was done by charity that private charity could do; but it was a people in beggary; it was a nation which stretched out its hands for food. For months together these creatures of sufferance, whose very excess and luxury in their most plenteous days had fallen short of the allowance of our austere fasts, silent, patient, resigned, without sedition or disturbance, almost without complaint, perished by a hundred a day in the streets of Madras; every day seventy at least laid their bodies in the streets, or on the glacis of Tanjore, and expired of famine in the granary of India. . . .

Keeping close to the matter in hand, the orator now deals with the practical question of whether the

Carnatic could be expected to produce the revenue required to meet the debts. The Carnatic is a country not much inferior in extent to England ('Figure to yourself, Mr. Speaker, the land in whose representative chair you sit. . . . Extend your imagination a little further. . . .'). It was not, as had been asserted, a country that would quickly recover; its prosperity depended upon artificial irrigation. ('In that country Nature has given no short cuts to your object. Man propagates, like other animals, through the mouth. Never did oppression light the nuptial torch. . . .') A map is produced, with an estimate of the number of reservoirs throughout the whole territory, but very few of these 'magazines of water' had escaped destruction or injury. Then, by a transition as just as it is beautiful, the orator passes to what should have been the duty of government in the face of these calamities :

What, sir, would a virtuous and enlightened ministry do on the view of the ruins of such works before them?—on the view of such a chasm of desolation as that which yawned in the midst of those countries to the north and south which still bore some vestiges of cultivation? They would have reduced all their most necessary establishments; they would have suspended the justest payments; they would have employed every shilling derived from the producing, to reanimate the powers of the unproductive parts. While they were performing this fundamental duty, whilst they were celebrating these mysteries of justice and humanity, they would have told the corps of fictitious creditors, whose crimes were their claims, that they must keep an awful distance; that they must silence their inauspicious tongues; that they must hold off their profane, unhallowed paws from this holy work; they would have proclaimed with a voice that should make itself heard, that in every country the first creditor is the plough; that this original, indefeasible claim supersedes every other demand.

Nor were the baleful effects of Indian financial corruption confined to India ; ' the breakers of law in India became the makers of law in England '. Burke's disgust at a social phenomenon to which we have seen him alluding in his speech on the *East India Bill* finds tremendous utterance in the latter portion of this speech, and this disgust, we may add, was shared by many to whom the traditional standards and decencies of English life were dear. ' Nabobs ' returned to introduce examples of the vulgarest luxury into English society, to raise the price of provisions for thirty miles round their country seats, and that of parliamentary boroughs to quite uncompetitive heights. The most considerable and the most shady of the Nabob of Arcot's alleged creditors, Paul Benfield by name, had recently been in England, where he had secured the return of eight members of Parliament out of the proceeds of his Indian peculations. In what Disraeli calls ' that ornament of debate, invective ', Burke is not always happy, but he strikes the right note here. Seldom in literature, and probably never in oratory, has scorn received such expression. ' The public-spirited usurer, amidst his charitable toils for the relief of India, did not forget the poor, rotten Constitution of his native country,' but, ' as soon as he had conferred the above-mentioned benefit on the Constitution had withdrawn himself from our applause. Mr. Benfield was no sooner elected than he set off for Madras, and defrauded the longing eyes of Parliament. We have never enjoyed in this House the luxury of beholding that minion of the human race, and contemplating the visage which has so long reflected the happiness of nations.' Here as elsewhere

the orator seeks and finds similitudes adequate to express his loathing of fraud and cruelty. With an intense realisation alike of man's spiritual nature, and of

the dung,
The beggar's nurse, and Caesar's,

his imagination shrinks from nothing. 'That debt forms the foul, putrid mucus, in which are engendered the whole brood of creeping ascarides, all the endless involutions, the eternal knot added to a knot of those inexpugnable tape-worms which devour the nutriment and eat up the bowels of India.' 'Heedious,' said Weir of Hermiston, in the matter of the hanging of Duncan Jopp, 'I never gave twa thoughts to heediousness; I have no call to be bonny', and Burke conceived that he had no call to be genteel in characterising some very hideous transactions. As regards the right hon. gentleman (Dundas), who had urged 'that this inquiry is of a delicate nature and that the state will suffer detriment by the exposure of this transaction', the orator tempers scorn with a burst of Rabelaisian laughter.

He and delicacy are a rare and a singular coalition. He thinks that to divulge our Indian politics may be highly dangerous. He ! the mover ! the chairman ! the reporter of the committee of secrecy ! he that brought forth in the utmost detail, in several vast printed folios, the most recondite parts of the politics, the military, the revenues of the British Empire in India ! With six great chopping bastards,¹ each as lusty as an Infant Hercules, this delicate

¹ Six reports of the Committee of Secrecy—Burke's note, see p. 149. As to the Infant Hercules, Burke was no doubt thinking of Reynolds' picture, for which a child born on his estate had served as a model. According to a prophecy made to Aeneas by the god of the river Tiber, the site of Rome was to be marked by a white sow and her litter.

creature blushes at the sight of her new bridegroom, assumes a virgin delicacy ; or to use a more fit, as well as a more poetic comparison, the person so squeamish, so timid, so trembling lest the winds of heaven should visit too roughly, is expanded to the broad sunshine, exposed like the sow of imperial augury, lying in the mud with all the prodigies of her fertility about her, as evidence of her delicate amours—*Triginta capitum foetus enixa jacebat, alba solo recubans albi circum ubera nati.*

Burke concluded by declaring his determination to prosecute to the end his efforts on behalf of the peoples of India.

Whether this indictment was capable of being effectively answered we do not know, for it received no answer of any kind. As soon as Burke had sat down loud cries arose for a division ; Pitt and Dundas hastily debated whether Burke had made any impression on the House, and concluded that he had not. Erskine, who afterwards ‘thumbed to bits’ the printed copy of the speech, tells us that he was unable to listen to it as delivered, and congratulated himself on having been able to slip out of the House unobserved by the orator. The reception which the speech met with need not surprise us ; it is magnificent, but it is not, and never could have been, Parliamentary oratory.

Burke was depressed by the failure of this effort, and, after this, he published no more of his speeches in full. But he was now only the more determined to bring to justice the man whom he had come to regard as the arch-criminal of India. Francis had by now been at home for some four years, and having secured a seat in Parliament by means of the wealth which he had quite honestly acquired in India, he had enjoyed a further opportunity of feeding fat the ancient

grudge he bore the Governor-General. We have already seen how his sagacious and interested hatred was nourishing the pure flame of Burke's zeal. Each of the two men supplied exactly what was wanting to the other, and together they formed as formidable a pair of antagonists as any man was ever called upon to face. Burke had already (July 1784) demanded certain papers relative to Warren Hastings, but unsuccessfully. Hastings was now due to return. His enemies had, in his own words, 'sickened, died, and fled', and he had latterly enjoyed an undisputed ascendancy. Leaving a tranquillised India behind him, he landed at Plymouth in June 1785, justly proud of his life's work and mistakenly confident of his reception. Burke straightway gave notice that he would at a future date make a motion respecting the conduct of a gentleman just returned from India. But it was at the very end of the session, and, if Hastings himself had observed a prudent silence, the matter might have been indefinitely postponed.

It was not in any case a hopeful undertaking on which Burke proposed to enter. It is true that the parliamentary committees previously referred to had reported against Hastings, and that he had been retained in office in flat defiance of a resolution passed by the House of Commons. But so rapid had been the turns of the political wheel within three years that all this was becoming ancient history. The King was strongly in Hastings' favour, as were the East India Company also. The path of Hastings' accusers would in fact have been exceedingly difficult if he had received or had been willing to act upon competent advice. But he proceeded, partly from ignorance and

partly from temperament, to throw away one card after another. His tactics were singularly maladroit and provocative as compared with those of Clive, who besides commanding the prestige, denied to Hastings, of victories won in the field, had been careful to avoid courting parliamentary inquiry. Hastings made one great initial mistake. Directly Parliament re-assembled, he allowed his inept parliamentary agent, Major Scott, to challenge Burke to produce his charges. He subsequently read to the House of Commons a long and tedious written defence, from which many members, however unable to judge the subject-matter, gained one strong impression at any rate, viz that Hastings regarded himself as answerable to the East India Company rather than to Parliament. He despised, to quote from one of his letters, 'the whole tribe of Francis's, Fox's and Burkes', and met them quite half-way in declining to avail himself of the plea that his great services should be regarded as a 'set off' against particular irregularities. His parliamentary agent later on proclaimed that the incriminated transactions, so far from comprising any details for which the only possible excuse would be found in the pressure of an instant emergency, were 'just and meritorious' at all points. The utter inability of Burke and Hastings to understand anything of the other's point of view is one of the most extraordinary features of the whole business.

Burke accepted Scott's challenge in a speech which led Dundas to remark jocularly that he was very thankful *he* was not going to be impeached.¹ He took

¹ By an irony of fate he was himself impeached (as Lord Melville) in 1806, his case providing the last occasion when the

his stand, skilfully enough, on the resolutions adverse to Hastings that had been passed by the committees. Of three possible modes of proceeding, he maintained, a criminal prosecution in the Court of King's Bench would be inappropriate to a case of this magnitude; a Bill of Pains and Penalties would be unfair to the accused, and there remained only impeachment. This process, in which the House of Commons act as accusers and the House of Lords as judges, afforded, and still in theory affords, the ultimate mode by which a minister can be called to account for grave public crimes. But it was too cumbrous an instrument to be lightly invoked. As Burke soon discovered, an opinion that Hastings' conduct called for inquiry was one thing, but an impeachment was another. With his actual accusations he lost no time. He grouped them under twenty-two heads, and the *Articles of Charge against Warren Hastings* have been permitted to cumber the standard edition of his works to the extent of some three hundred and fifty substantial pages. They range from the important matter of the Rohilla War to 'contracts for Poolbundy repairs'. Any one who turns them over will agree with Pitt that they are 'confused and complicated, and in many places unintelligible'; but it should be remembered that they were only meant to be the raw material out of which the actual indictment was to be fashioned.

Step by step Burke and his friends fought the charges through the House of Commons with varying success. So far as can be judged by the summaries preserved, Burke's speeches throughout these pre-

process was employed. Hastings is said to have predicted that he would be

liminary proceedings compare favourably with all except the first of those that he delivered during the impeachment itself. In a fine speech¹ with which he introduced the articles of charge he claimed, with perfect justice, that he did not stand alone, but had a respectable body of opinion behind him. He had no private differences with Mr. Hastings, not for a moment. Anger, indeed, he had felt, but surely not a blameable anger ;

for who ever heard of an inquiring anger, a digesting anger, a collating anger, an examining anger, or a selecting anger ? The anger which he felt was a uniform, steady, public anger, but not a private anger. What, in fact, the House had to vote that day was not the case of Mr. Hastings ; Mr. Hastings was out of the question ; matters of much higher interest called for their decision. They were that day to vote a set of maxims and principles to be the rule and guide to future governors in India, to Lord Cornwallis, who was about to proceed thither as Governor-General. What they now determined would decide what the world would think of British justice and British policy.

The charge relating to the Rohilla War, in which Hastings had undoubtedly loaned a brigade of English troops to a native ruler for the purpose of taking part in native warfare, was taken first. This charge, the most important of the series, failed, not on the grounds on which subsequent investigation has explained and apparently justified it, but on the ground that it had been condoned by Hastings' subsequent appointment as Governor-General. The accusers, having been thus prevented from getting at Hastings where they would, were all the more determined to get at him where they could. Fox then moved the ' Benares '

¹ *Collected Speeches*, iii. 247.

charge, in which Hastings was accused of having oppressively exacted an enormous fine from Cheyt Singh for an alleged act of contumacy. This matter afforded the surprise of the whole case. Pitt, who had preserved an attitude of caution throughout but had voted against the Rohilla charge, now declared in effect that, after a study of the question, he could not resist the conclusion that the Benares charge contained criminal matter, though he made some reservation on the question of impeachment. Pitt's motives have been much questioned, but there is no real ground for supposing that his very influential decision was not the outcome of an honest conviction that on this count at any rate there was a *prima facie* case against Hastings. The impression, indeed, that one gains from this stage of the proceedings is that the chief actors showed themselves in their best light; Pitt displayed a judicial impartiality, the accusers a comparative moderation, the King a rough common sense. Mr. Pitt, George III. wrote, must vote as he thought right, but for his own part he did not think it possible in India 'to carry on public business with the same moderation that is suitable to a European civilised country'. The next article of charge related to the 'Begums of Oude'. Here, to put it very shortly, Hastings was accused of having made a treaty with the Nabob of Oude by which the Nabob's mother and grandmother were, as a punishment for alleged acts of disaffection, to be deprived of certain property, and of having effected his purpose with quite unwarrantable violence. This was regarded as the gravest charge of all apart from the Rohilla War, and Burke proposed to take it himself. Sheridan, however, doubtless seeing dramatic possi-

bilities in the story, marked it down for his own, and Burke gave way. Of Sheridan's five hours' speech it can only be said that it swept his audience off their feet and led to an adjournment of the House. Pitt himself, who was not likely to be swept off his feet by any eloquence, never, as Sir Gilbert Elliot tells us, gave the least sign of feeling or of life throughout the whole performance; but he confessed directly after its conclusion that an abler speech had perhaps never been delivered. This charge and other charges were allowed, and the impeachment resolved upon. Here, again, Hastings met his accusers half-way. A vote of censure would undoubtedly have satisfied the majority of the Whigs at an earlier stage of the proceedings, but it would certainly not have satisfied Burke, and it is doubtful whether it would have satisfied the accused. Hastings now expressed a desire that, matters having gone so far, the case should go for trial, and his parliamentary agent accordingly voted for the impeachment. After all, the man who had grappled with the bitterest antagonists at the closest quarters in that stormy council chamber at Calcutta, who had barely escaped with his life from the rising at Benares, who had, with Eyre Coote, faced and checked Hyder Ali, was not likely now to quail before accusers whose bark he doubtless suspected would prove much worse than their bite.

Burke in due course, followed by many members of the House of Commons, appeared at the bar of the House of Lords and solemnly impeached Warren Hastings according to the ancient form. The Lords fixed a day early in the following year for the beginning of the trial, and it was determined that it should be conducted with all the circumstance appertaining to

an historic and momentous ceremony. The Commons had next to appoint a committee to draw up the articles of impeachment and subsequently to conduct the prosecution. The first place was by general consent allotted to Burke, and one inevitable question subsequently arose. On that question Pitt voiced the sentiments of the majority of the House by declaring that, however gentlemen might argue on the matter, it was not a question of argument but a question of feeling, and that there was a feeling against appointing Francis to this committee. To Burke's much too loudly expressed disappointment his intelligent but unpleasing partner was accordingly excluded from any official part in the impeachment proceedings, and had to content himself with being an informal adviser and an exceedingly gratified spectator. However, of such assistance as eloquence at any rate, if not industry, could afford him, Burke had no lack; Fox, Sheridan, Windham, Grey, Elliot and other lesser lights formed the managing committee of twenty over which he presided. The accused also, it soon appeared, was to be very adequately defended. Erskine, the greatest advocate of the day, had for political reasons declined a brief, but Hastings secured the services of Law (afterwards Lord Ellenborough), and of two other leaders of the bar, Dallas and Plumer.

Burke's five years of effort were now to be rewarded. In considering the result, we should avoid confusing three different and successive phases of the whole complicated business; the proceedings which led up to the impeachment, the trial itself, and the verdict which subsequent historical investigation has pronounced upon Hastings' career. Such investigation has, as is

well known, vindicated the second founder of our Indian Empire in the larger lineaments of his character and the broad lines of his policy. But it did not necessarily appear so then, nor, because modern authorities hold that Hastings' irregularities did not merit impeachment, need we read back their verdict into those times. No doubt, again, contemporary gossip as retailed by Wraxall, and later gossip as retailed by Moore and others, would have it that Francis worked on Burke, that Burke worked on Fox, that Sheridan was only too glad to seize the opportunity of displaying his talents on a conspicuous platform, that Pitt was only too glad to see the Opposition expending their energies on a remote and unfruitful field, that William Burke in India had something to do with it, and so on. In a matter of this kind motives may be endlessly imputed. No doubt the question became, as any question of this magnitude was bound to have become, to some extent a party question ; and no doubt Burke had two allies whom he would wish away. None the less, the decision to impeach was voted by a House which, though we have been concerned only with one side, had heard both sides of the case as it was presented at the time, nor is there any reason to suppose that the malignity of Francis, combined with the pure zeal of Burke, would by themselves have sufficed for such a result. From first to last there were too many in it. Pitt's final pronouncement,¹ too

¹ *Parl. Hist.*, xxvi. 1135 sq. Cf also a passage in a letter from Dundas to Cornwallis of March 21, 1787, quoted by Mr. Roberts, *op cit.* 217, with reference *Correspondence of . Marquis Cornwallis*—Ross, vol i. p 281. 'The proceeding [*i. e.* the impeachment] is not pleasant to many of our friends, and of course from that and many other circumstances not pleasing to us ; but the truth is, when we examined the various articles of

long to quote here, was that the impeachment should go forward, and those who read it will probably feel that it represents an honestly formed opinion which was shared by many others.

Least of all need Burke's personal sincerity be questioned. Whatever may be said, and, as we shall see, there is a great deal to be said against the manner in which he conducted the prosecution, the motives which impelled him to undertake it defy challenge. He had never seen India and did not know Hastings. Nor had he even any hope of such a personal triumph as a conviction would give him; he had never from the start expected that Hastings would be convicted.¹ He was concerned rather to secure the enactment, on a stage visible to all England and Europe, of a palpable and spectacular warning that the imputation of grave public crimes against subject races should not pass without a solemn inquiry. He was, in truth, concurring with, and supported by, the first strivings of a humanitarian impulse which was already opening men's eyes to the iniquities of the slave trade and was, after a long set-back, to culminate in the social legislation of the third decade of the succeeding century. No man ever acted as Burke acted, toiled as he toiled, spoke as he spoke, whose spirit was not touched to finer issues than any personal or party advantage.

charge against him with his defences, they were so strong, and the defences so perfectly unsupported, it was impossible not to concur'

¹ *Corr*, III 38 (Dec 1785) 'Speaking for myself my business is not to consider what will convict Mr Hastings (a thing we all know to be impracticable) but what will acquit and justify myself to those few persons and to those distant times which may take a concern in these affairs and in the actors of them.' On January 2, 1789, Francis wrote to Burke to the effect that he thought there was just a chance of securing a conviction.

The appointed day arrived, and on February 13, 1788, the Right Hon Edmund Burke led into Westminster Hall the Committee of Managers appointed 'to defend the articles which had been exhibited by the Knights, Citizens, and Burgesses in Parliament in maintenance of their impeachment against Warren Hastings, Esq., late Governor-General of Bengal, for high crimes and misdemeanours'.

CHAPTER VIII

IMPEACHMENT OF WARREN HASTINGS

(1788)

THE impeachment of Warren Hastings belongs to an age that has passed away; no such spectacle, it is safe to predict, will ever be seen again. The process has long been obsolete, and the oratory would now be impossible. When Macaulay wrote in 1841 the proceedings in Westminster Hall had not passed altogether out of living memory, and were still a cherished tradition of the Whigs. Macaulay was a whole-hearted admirer of Burke; he admired Hastings also; and his essay, in spite of all the corrections which it has since been found to need, represents a sincere endeavour to do justice both to the accuser and to the accused. He knew, from actual experience, the scene of the events which were so long and so hotly debated, nor was the interval between his own Indian service and the last years of Hastings' administration so long as to have extinguished all oral tradition. The cause was one in which the giants of his own political party had put forth all their strength. It is no wonder that the opening scenes of the trial should have stirred him to the display of an eloquence recalling that of Burke himself, and of a faculty of pictorial description unsurpassed if not

unequalled by any other historian. Macaulay has depicted, once for all, a pageant which lacked no element of appeal to the mind and the eye, which seemed to lend visible form to the spirit of English government and English law, and to afford, in the assemblage of actors and spectators who filled the vast hall, a living panorama of the national achievement in the arts of peace and war. Nor has he confined himself merely to the external setting of the wonderful scene. He has described the dauntless front which Hastings presented to his arraignment, and also the burning hatred of oppression, the intense realisation of suffering at the other end of the world, which nerved Burke to a task as thankless as it was immense. We can only wish that he had undertaken, in the vivid and incisive manner of which he had the secret, a fuller delineation of the motives which animated some others among the strangely assorted band of accusers ; of the wide and tender humanity of Fox, the high-bred and delicate feeling of Windham, the histrionic vanity of Sheridan, and even the statesmanlike instincts which were not wholly lacking to the triumphant malice of Francis.

Renouncing any attempt at eloquence on his own account, the present biographer gladly takes refuge in one of the boxes which surrounded the hall. Among the occupants of this box was a lady whose recent publication of *Evelina* had, on the *lucus a non lucendo* principle, led to her appointment as tire-woman to Queen Charlotte. Miss Burney had doubtless arisen at six A.M. in order to be in Westminster Hall by nine, as had other ladies who, in the words of a contemporary correspondent, 'waited there, shivering, with-

out either fires or beaux to warm them, till eleven'. At that hour the Managers made their appearance, resplendent in full dress and swords; the leading Manager, it was observed, showed no trace of any legitimate satisfaction which he might have felt, but looked grim and careworn. Miss Burney was duly impressed with the processions of peers and commons, and about noon the proceedings began with the Lord Chancellor's speech to the prisoner at the bar, and the prisoner's few words in reply. A very great lady who, like Miss Burney and all the court, was strongly prepossessed in favour of Hastings, had meanwhile made herself exceedingly polite, as had also a Mr Crutchley. The Archbishop of York, Mr Crutchley bade Miss Burney notice, was reading the impeachment articles with great attention. But Dr. Markham might have spared himself that trouble; every one knew that Hastings had promoted his youthful son in India, and that he meant to vote for an acquittal—as indeed his Grace, stimulated perhaps by the manner in which Burke subsequently examined young Markham, eventually did. Miss Burney also came in for attention from some of the Managers of the impeachment, which, considering her position and opinions, embarrassed her at first. She had to suffer the greetings of young Mr. Richard Burke, who jumped upon a bench to reach her; and subsequently, Mr. Burke himself, on the only occasion that he had hitherto 'played truant from the Managers' box', came across to speak to her. It soon appeared that the day was to be entirely occupied by the reading of the articles of impeachment and of the defendant's replies thereto. Miss Burney felt accordingly free to converse at considerable length

with Mr. Windham, Mr. Burke's great friend Mr. Windham, after some edifying remarks upon the instability of human greatness, agreed that Mr. Hastings should not have been required to submit to the formal humiliation of kneeling at the bar ; he himself had, indeed, turned his head away during that performance. Miss Burney had, it appeared, met Mr. Hastings some time before, and found him very natural and pleasant in the way he talked about India to a then unknown girl. Mr. Windham had previously seen him only at the bar of the House of Commons ; and there, as Mr. Burke admirably said, he looked like a hungry tiger ready to howl for his prey. Miss Burney was sure he did not look fierce now ; somewhat contemptuous she thought he did look—a term which Mr. Windham did not like. What colour was Mr. Hastings dressed in ? Was it blue or purple, and ought it not in the circumstances to have been black ? Miss Burney had read a piece of Mr. Hastings' writing ; it seemed to be good in parts but unequal. That ambiguity, Mr. Windham observed, ran through Mr. Hastings in everything ; Mr. Burke had found an admirable and untranslatable word for it in the Persian tongue,¹ —but Miss Burney did not presume to transcribe Persian. Miss Burney must not fail to come and hear Mr. Burke ; his eloquence was irresistible ; it was a torrent that swept all before it ; and it would cure her

¹ Cf. from Burke's Speech on the Sixth Charge (*Works*, vii. 400) ' You have heard of the oriental figure called, in the banyan language, a *pamche* ; in English, a *screw* , it is a puzzled and studied involution of a period, framed in order to prevent the discovery of truth and the detection of fraud, and surely it cannot be better exemplified than in this sentence, " Neither shall I attempt to add more than the clearer affirmation of the facts implied in that report of them, and such inferences as necessarily, or with a strong probability follow from them " '

of her prepossessions.—The clerk of the Court meanwhile was continuing his reading hour after hour, until the light failed, and he could read no more. Before the Court rose from the first of its many sittings, judges, accusers, accused, the whole crowded scene, had assumed a dim and spectral appearance, prophetic of the fate which was ultimately to attend so much effort and so much eloquence.

On the third day Burke rose to open the impeachment. The judges whom he was to address were predominantly ill-disposed towards the prosecution, and, as he was also well aware, many of the gossiping sightseers regarded the trial as nothing more than a political display and himself as the persecutor of an innocent man. But he was thereby only the more strengthened in his determination to do the fullest justice to a cause of which, as his own words remain to testify, he had formed the loftiest idea. He was not only the chief representative of the Commons of England before the two other Estates of the Realm. He saw himself as a mediator between two civilisations, as a minister charged with a mission first of vengeance and then of reconciliation, as an instrument whereby, in his own words, ‘the faith which holds the moral elements of the world together’ was to be vindicated, as a protagonist in a drama of divine justice. Inspired as he was alike by his conception of his task, by the character of the tribunal before which he was to plead, by the presence of the assembly who were awaiting his execution of the commission with which they had entrusted him, and by thoughts of those distant and more appealing clients whom he saw in his imagination

Throng to the bar, crying all guilty, guilty,

he was moved in an only less degree by the nature and the historic associations of the impeachment process itself. Among those enemies of political liberty and order whom an impeachment had assailed in the past, one name especially seemed to be recalled by the prisoner at the bar.¹ But it was as a Strafford who had been able to work an unscrupulous will to more obviously disastrous effect, and over a wider area of humanity, that Hastings appeared to Burke. All the vicious elements in a whole system of policy, all the wrongs that had been committed by his countrymen in India, all the unhealthy effects on English national life of ill-gotten wealth from the East, he saw embodied and concentrated in the man he was accusing.

Never had orator such an opportunity, and never was orator more conscious of it. Burke's introductory speech was, for far the larger part, worthy of the cause and the occasion. The delinquencies of Hastings were considered, not only as they were alleged to be in themselves, but as illustrated by the clash of contrasting races and contrasting politics, by a glowing presentation of the cardinal features of an unfamiliar civilisation, and by a lofty assertion of the duty of England to India. As to the accusations, the orator stated, the Commons wished to make every allowance for cases where necessity knew no law. But the crimes now alleged were not of that character, nor was the criminal an ordinary criminal.

Let everything be pleaded that can be pleaded on the score of error and infirmity ; we give up the whole ; we

¹ See the Report on the Duration of Hastings' Trial (1794) (p. 292 following) for evidence of how Burke was steeped in the history of impeachments.

stand on crimes of deliberation ; we charge him with nothing that he did not commit against remonstrances ; we charge him with nothing that he did not commit against command ; we charge him with nothing that he did not commit contrary to the advice, to the admonition, and to the reprimand of those who were authorised by the laws to reprove and reprimand him. They were crimes not against morals, but against those eternal laws of justice which you are assembled here to assert. They are not in formal and technical language, but in real and absolute effect, high crimes and misdemeanours.

A brief sketch of the races of India and of the chief eras in the history of the country, a too optimistic estimate of conditions as they were previous to the advent of the British, an account of the constitution and position of the East India Company, a claim, supported by instances, that Hastings' administration had been corrupt, tyrannical, and inspired by motives of wanton aggression against native rulers, passionate protests against his 'geographical morality'; some terrible narratives of cruelty and extortion alleged to have been committed by native agents: such was the substance of a speech which lasted four days. Whether or not, as Burke at one time stated, our power in India was 'at best a grievance', he refused now to embark on any discussion of its justification. It was, he held, an established situation, and a situation moreover which might be, if we would, converted into beneficent uses. 'There is a sacred veil to be drawn over the beginning of all government. Ours in India had an origin like those which time has sanctified by obscurity.' It was now open to England to justify this power, however acquired, by the punishment of the arch-culprit at the bar, and by the institution of an enlightened system of

government. In conclusion, the orator invoked the constituent elements of the Court before which he was pleading ; the Heir Apparent to the Crown , the older nobility whose honours were hereditary, the newer nobility who had won their titles by achievement, the lords learned in the law ; the bishops who represented the religion of charity—to all of whom he committed the cause of India and of humanity.

It became evident that the orator's strength was unable to sustain the full burden of his task, his nervous organisation unable to control the stress of an overwhelming emotion, and he broke down more than once. Burke had long brooded over his cause, and the longer he brooded the darker were the colours that Hastings assumed in the sombre recesses of his imagination. He was hurried into describing, in a manner beyond all bearing, some atrocities imputed to one Debi Singh, whom Hastings was alleged to have corruptly placed in charge of the revenues of a province. In so doing he spared his audience nothing, no revolting detail of Oriental torture. It is no wonder that women screamed, or, considering what 'sensibility' was in those days, that Mrs. Sheridan was carried out fainting. The recital was indeed enough to sicken any one, and the orator himself had to stop. Law's opening speech for the defence protested strongly, but not too strongly, against this introduction of matter extraneous to the actual charges ; and it remains the greatest blot on Burke's conduct of the impeachment.¹ Compared to this, the scurrility of

¹ There is no accounting for changes of taste. Major Scott, some years later, said that the only passages from the earlier speeches which were then remembered with admiration were this one of Burke's (*Works*, vii. 186 sq.), and what now reads as an amazing piece of rant from a subsequent speech of Sheridan's

invective with which he has been frequently and justly reproached is a small matter. For that he could have pleaded the precedent of the greatest orator of antiquity, and he did plead that strong facts must be described in strong language. However, the worst that he could do in that direction was to come later; in this speech his onslaught, however exaggerated, is in the grand manner. The retired poet who had been Hastings' schoolfellow considered indeed that Burke was merely indulging in what had been the traditional rhetoric of state trials from the time of Cicero downwards. 'He who accuses another to the state', wrote Cowper to Lady Hesketh (Feb. 22, 1788), 'in order to impress the minds of his hearers with a persuasion that he himself is convinced of the criminality of the prisoner, must be vehement, energetic, rapid; must call him tyrant and traitor and everything else that is odious, and all this to his face, because all this, bad as it is, is no more than he undertakes to prove in the sequel'; and if he does not prove it, he will appear 'to have trifled with the tribunal to which he has summoned him'. But it does not appear that Burke had the least need of stimulus from merely conventional motives on this occasion.

Much, though not quite all, of the eloquence which held Westminster Hall for four days falls flat enough now. This and the two other enormous speeches which Burke delivered during the impeachment are not in truth readable to-day except in their more general

about filial love and parental affection, see Adolphus, *Hist of England*, vi. 163. Adolphus gives a useful précis of the impeachment proceedings, the only one indeed which exists except for a much less useful one in Mill's *History of British India*.

portions ; though the most casual examination will show what astonishing efforts they really were. The question was, after all, one purely of fact ; no one defends the things of which Hastings was accused ; and, if the facts do not show that his administration was of the character alleged, there is nothing more to be said. Burke's distorted picture of Hastings had no doubt some foundation in evidence of a kind which was liable to be honestly misinterpreted by any one who had never been on the spot. History has made due allowance for the Governor-General's position between Leadenhall Street pressing for money on the one hand and anarchy, or something like it, on the other ; but this allowance Burke was disqualified from making by the quality alike of his knowledge and of his temperament. His 'imagination and his passions', it is often said, vitiated his judgement. No doubt they did, but we may distinguish a little. He never, it is true, had much insight into individual character,¹ and his imagination certainly led him to form a quite erroneous estimate of Hastings' character. Nor, as we have already seen and shall see again, was his judgement of particular situations always reliable. As regards Hastings and his policy, it was for the most part wrong ; but in the Madras business, as those very historians seem to admit who blame him most strongly in the former particular, it was absolutely right. His 'passions', on the other hand, do not seem to need

¹ Burke never, so far as I remember, really attempts to delineate individual character anywhere in his letters or his works. In the character sketches, excellent in their way, contained in the *American Taxation* speech, he is really thinking of the type, and not the individual ; of Townshend as the type of the clever man who tries to please everybody ; of Grenville as the type of the rigidly official mind in politics.

any particular apology ; to hate cruelty and injustice too much rather than too little is not of a dangerous example.

His protests against 'arbitrary power' in this connection certainly seem to savour rather of the moderate constitutionalism of the Rockinghams than of any understanding of the position of a man of action placed in circumstances of great difficulty and with nothing to go by. Yet it is to a general point of view of which these protests are one aspect that the speech owes its real significance. Burke's hostility to the unhistorical rationalism of his century was to be more fully developed in connection with the French Revolution, but it is implicit here also. It was his keen sense of the existence and the historic character of an alien civilisation which prompted his passionate demands, new then, commonplace now, that Indian administration should have regard, so far as may be, to the religion, the laws, and the customs of the native peoples, and should be informed by, as we should say now, ethnological study. It was as the subverter of an ancient and settled social order that Hastings seemed most dangerous to Burke both in his actions and his example, and it is that, however inadequate, conception of him which lends its real weight to this tremendous denunciation. His hearers, we are told, remarked the peculiar animation with which Burke delivered passages descriptive of the facts of Indian civilisation, such as the following, as to 'the people called *Gentoos*'.¹

¹ This passage is given as actually spoken (Bond, 1 33). As revised for publication by Burke (*Works*, vii. 43) the main argument is made clearer as follows : 'all change on their part is absolutely impracticable. We have more versatility of character and manners, and it is we who must conform', inserted near the bottom of the following page.

The system and principles of their government are local ; their laws, their manners, their religion, are local. Their legislator, whoever he was—for that is lost in the mists of a very obscure antiquity—had it as the great leading principle of his policy to connect the people with their soil, and accordingly, by one of those anomalies which time daily discovers, and which perhaps reflection would explain in the nature of man, these people, who are the most benevolent and of a larger circle of benevolence than our morals take in, who extend their benevolence to the whole animal creation—these people are the most unalliable to any other part of the creation. They cannot, the highest orders of them, touch that bond which is the bond of life, and which, by supporting the individual, unites them in other cases—I mean conviviality. That bond of life cannot be had with these people. And there are some circumstances relative to them that exclude them still more than I have mentioned from all immediate commerce with this nation, namely, that that very element which, while appearing to disconnect, unites mankind—I mean the sea—is to them a forbidden element. None of their high castes can without great danger to his situation—perhaps it is absolutely impossible to some of them—ever pass the sea. If it could be truly said that a great gulf is fixed between you and them, it is that gulf created by manners, opinions and laws, radicated in the very nature of the people, and which you can never efface from them. This forbids for ever all immediate communication between that country and this. And that, my Lords, makes it ten times more necessary for us to keep a strict eye upon all persons who go there, and so to conduct ourselves in our proceedings with regard to the knowledge of that country and all its affairs as may be conformable to their necessities and not to our inventions ; that we, if we must govern such a country, must govern them upon their own principles and maxims and not upon ours ; that we must not think to force them to our narrow ideas, but extend ours to take in theirs ; because to say that that people shall change their maxims, lives and opinions, is what cannot be. We know that empire of opinion is, I had almost said, human nature itself. It is, however, the

strongest part of human nature ; and more of the happiness and unhappiness of mankind resides in opinion than in all other external circumstances whatever. And, if it resides in us in opinion, much more does it reside in them in opinion. For sometimes our laws of religion differ from our laws of the land, sometimes our laws of the land differ from our laws of honour ; but in that country the laws of religion, the laws of the land and the laws of honour, are all united and consolidated in one, and bind a man eternally to the rules of what is called his caste.

Miss Burney, to whom we may now return for a few moments, had been escorted for her second day's attendance by her sailor brother James, who, though sound on the merits and wrongs of Hastings, displayed a disconcerting bluntness in addressing his sister's grand friends, and had not much use for eloquence. She had been swept off her feet for a time, but had not been cured of her prepossessions. Her impressions, as communicated to Windham, must be given in her own words :

I told him that his [Burke's] opening had struck me with the highest admiration for his powers . . . And when he came to his two narratives, I continued, when he related the particulars of those dreadful murders, he interested, he engaged, he at last overpowered me ; I felt my cause lost. I could hardly keep my seat. My eyes dreaded a glance towards a man so accused as Mr. Hastings. I wanted to sink in the floor that they might be saved so painful a sight. I had no hope he could clear himself ; not another wish in his favour remained. But when from this narration Mr. Burke proceeded to his own comments and declamations—when the charges of rapacity, cruelty, tyranny were general, and made with all the violence of personal detestation, and maintained and aggravated without any further fact or illustration, then there appeared more of study than of truth, more of invective than of justice, and, in short, so little of proof to so much of passion that in a very short

IMPEACHMENT OF WARREN HASTINGS 191

time I began to lift up my head, my seat was no longer uneasy, my eyes were indifferent which way they looked and what object caught them, and before I was myself aware of the declension of Mr. Burke's powers over my feelings, I found myself a mere spectator at a public place, and looking all around it with my opera glass in my hand !

His eyes sought the ground at this, and, with no other comment than a rather uncomfortable shrug of the shoulder, he expressively and concisely said, ' I comprehend you perfectly '.

CHAPTER IX

THE IMPEACHMENT CONTINUED—REGENCY BILL—BEGIN- NINGS OF FRENCH REVOLUTION

(1788-1790)

THE speech with which we have been concerned in the last chapter was, as we must inform such of our readers as have hitherto persevered, but a slight prelude, a mere introductory trifle, in relation to the proceedings which were to follow. The two first specific charges, *i.e.* those relating to Cheyt Singh and to the 'Begums of Oude', were next taken by Fox and by Sheridan respectively. The audience, Sir Gilbert Elliot tells us, expected from Sheridan the same species of entertainment, 'as if they were going to Garrick in *Lear* or even to the bottle conjuror'

which, to do Sheridan justice, was by no means all that they got. His speech, which followed the same general lines as that with which he had previously electrified the House of Commons, was the most admired of all. Nor is this so surprising, considering what Sheridan's talents were, and what his sense for dramatic effect must have been. Burke, differing in this respect from the finer taste of Fox,¹ admired

¹ See Rogers' *Table Talk*, and Moore's *Memoirs*, iv 192. In Lady Minto's *Life of Sir Gilbert Elliot*, i. 206, will be found an interesting comparison of Sheridan's and Burke's oratory.

Sheridan's speech immensely : ' that is the true style, something neither prose nor poetry, but better than either ', is reported to have been his astonishing verdict. After displaying all, and even more than all, the sentiment appropriate to an occasion on which royal ladies were alleged to have been robbed and their ministers maltreated, the dramatist feigned, as though exhausted, to sink back into the arms of Burke. ' Sensibility ', as we have already seen in the instance of Miss Burney, was all the vogue then, and this touch seems to have affected Sheridan's audience deeply ; what the law lords thought of it, we are not informed.

But we must return to the leading Manager Henry James, contemplating the Pont du Gard, was struck with the disproportion between its design and its purpose, an enormous pile of masonry built to carry the water of a couple of springs to a little provincial city. Some such contrast we feel when we see how the Roman massiveness of Burke's mind was to be employed throughout most of the remainder of the trial. So far, the case had related to affairs of undoubted magnitude, to important transactions with semi-independent native rulers. Now came a sudden descent to a series of charges as to which Burke was very conscious that ' their lordships would perhaps not find the same degree of entertainment that they had found in the others '.¹ These charges, which constituted the whole of the remaining articles of impeachment, related, generally speaking, to the corrupt acceptance of ' presents ' from native rulers, and, less serious, to the corrupt letting out of contracts

¹ Bond, ii. 10 ; the phrase was omitted in the revised version.

on such matters as supplying the army with bullocks, the feeding of elephants, and the disposal of the Company's opium. Burke himself concentrated on the more important of the former series, involving some allegations that Hastings had been corruptly influenced in making various appointments. His 'Bribery and Corruption' speech of four days (April and May 1789) is a work into which no one but a biographer probably ever has looked or certainly ever need look. It is redeemed by one or two fine passages as to the effect on national character of wealth from the East, a matter which, however irrelevant to Hastings, was relevant enough from the general point of view. Otherwise, it is something of a trial to Burke's admirers. He may very likely have been justified in his suspicions of the numerous testimonials which Hastings had procured from native sources, but it was inexcusable in him to compare them to the evidence as to character adduced as a matter of course by any Old Bailey felon in mitigation of sentence. Whatever Hastings may have done for the sake of the Company, and in whatever mystery he may have wrapped some transactions owing to difficulties with his colleagues and other causes, he was himself neither corrupt nor avaricious. If he had been he would, as Macaulay says, instead of bringing back a by no means immoderate fortune saved out of a very large official salary, have certainly returned the richest subject in Europe.

At the beginning, Burke had cheerfully spoken of the trial as likely to last three years, but those chiefly concerned began before very long to have some inkling of what it was really going to amount to.

Everything tended to make it both exceedingly long and exceedingly contentious. The prosecution was conducted by laymen and the defence by lawyers¹. The articles of impeachment, for which Burke was not solely responsible, had been drafted in what eminent legal authority considers to have been an unwarrantably slipshod manner and one consequently unfair to the defendant. The Managers were thinking all the time not only of whether Hastings was legally guilty of the specific charges alleged, but also of the general tenor of his example. In the matter of Cheyt Singh, for instance, it was not solely a question of whether, taking every circumstance of a most complicated case into consideration, Hastings was or was not justified in exacting an enormously heavy fine from that potentate, but whether the harshness and violence with which he admittedly acted did not constitute a bad precedent for the future. The defence, on the other hand, were naturally and rightly concerned simply to secure their client's acquittal on the actual charges by any means that the law allowed. The prosecution had maintained that the rules of evidence obtaining in the inferior courts were not applicable to an impeachment; the Court decided against them; but this decision did not prevent constant disputes as to the admissibility of particular items of evidence. The Managers were, for obvious reasons of time and space, in perpetual difficulties here. One whole day

¹ There were lawyers to assist the Managers, but they were kept in the background. As regards the impeachment articles, see Sir James Stephen's severe condemnation of them in the *Story of Nuncomar and Impey*, ii 8, he calls them 'shuffling and disingenuous'. They were drawn up by Burke, Laurence, Francis, and Sir G. Eliot (Francis, *Memoirs*, ii 287).

(June 31, 1789), for example, was spent in efforts by the prosecution to obtain the admission in evidence of a 'letter to Mr Goring containing accounts given by Munny Begum of presents made by her to Mr. Hastings', and other whole days were taken up with similar questions. The House of Lords could only sit on a very limited number of days during each parliamentary session, the proceedings in Westminster Hall could not begin until the House of Commons was actually sitting, and the forms and the sittings of the two Houses were always liable to clash. As soon as a point of law arose, the Lords retired to their own chamber to discuss it in private, a proceeding to which the Managers particularly objected. The trial was now becoming concerned with questions of which the ethics and the arithmetic would, as was said of some other transactions, have taxed the combined powers of Solomon and Hamblin Smith. The interest of both Lords and Commons soon wore off, to say nothing of that of the general public. Not long after the trial began, we are told by the contemporary chronicler, 'the Court was very thin; scarcely one woman of fashion and not twenty of the Commons'. No doubt the severest sufferer from the ordeal was the defendant, but it should not be forgotten that the accuser suffered too.

However, Burke struggled manfully on against a combination of circumstances that might have daunted a much younger man. The Lords, as became evident before long, intended to adopt the standpoint of a rough common sense, and to apply the principle of 'set off' which both Burke and Hastings deprecated. Burke's allies soon lost heart. Fox was showing him-

self pessimistic about the whole business, and Sheridan went about saying that he wished Hastings would run away, and Burke after him. One particular set-back Burke found none the less humiliating because he had brought it upon himself. In the opening of the 'Bribery' speech he had been hurried by his feelings into the improper and irrelevant statement that, if necessary, he would undertake to prove that Hastings had murdered Nuncomar through the hands of Sir Elijah Impey. Hastings' counsel naturally objecting, the matter was brought up in the House of Commons, and Burke was censured. In bowing to this censure, Burke asserted that 'neither hope, nor fear, nor anger would remove him from the trust committed to his charge, nothing but a solemn resolution of the House of Commons taking away his commission, or totally cutting him off from the means of performing it'. Public interest momentarily revived at this, and on the next day of the trial there was a crowd to hear how Burke would behave, how he would explain to the Court a matter of which it had no official cognisance. Burke performed this difficult task with sufficient dignity, and then proceeded to detail to a thin and listless House various circumstances relative to 'the hoards of the banyan Gunga Govin Singh, the gains of the usurer Nobkissen, and the inexplicable explanations of the Accountant-General Larkins'.¹

Major Scott, Hastings' agent, was the means vouchsafed by Providence of supplying from time to time a little light relief to these appalling proceedings. In

¹ Macknight, iii. 257 It seems to be agreed now that there is no evidence implicating Hastings in any aspect of the Nuncomar affair, and that in any case Nuncomar had a fair trial.

order partly to combat the unpopularity attaching to 'Nabobs', Hastings had been persuaded to embark on an extensive press campaign, in which hired and anonymous stabbers repaid with interest the oral invectives of 'that reptile Mr. Burke'. More good-tempered are the *Letters of Simpkín the Second* (1789), alluded to by Macaulay, which purported to be the impressions of a country cousin from Wales, and burlesqued in doggerel verse the speeches of the Managers. A prose appendix consists of parodies of the Managers' style of examining witnesses, *e.g.* :

'Do you know—whether it was known—that such a person knew ?'

'Have you any idea that such a person supposed that the defendant was acquainted with what they were informed of ?'

'Can you recollect what is said to be forgotten about the year 1770—and which, if you won't, we will prove ?'—how much truth there was in all this the present deponent, who confesses to having found the speeches alone far more than he can cope with and to never having seen the numerous folio volumes which contain the notes of evidence, is unable to say. Scott himself was called to account for some libellous articles on the Managers, and some items of a bill which were published in one of the newspapers caused considerable amusement :

'To attacking Mr. Burke's veracity, 5s. 6d.

To accusing Mr. Burke of inconsistency, 9s.

Attempting to ridicule Mr. Burke, 5s. 6d.'¹

Not long after this Burke and Scott again came into

¹ The last two items, though they occur in one account, may be apocryphal.

collision, on an occasion when certain effusions of the latter's, and also the inordinate length of the trial, were under the consideration of the House. In justification of his own activities Scott pleaded the example of Burke himself, who had also published twelve pamphlets and speeches up to date. The implied comparison between the Major's productions and *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, the speeches on *Conciliation with America* and on the *Nabob of Arcot's Debts*, seems to have been too much for a House by no means friendly to Burke, and Scott did not escape a reprimand.¹

Burke's mortifications were many during the earlier years of Pitt's administration. Nor, as remarked in a previous chapter, does he appear to advantage in the part he played in some of the activities of the Whig opposition. He took the fullest share in combating Pitt's proposals for commercial union with France and Ireland, proposals which have been generally approved by subsequent opinion, and reflect the doctrine of Adam Smith. Anxious, financially embarrassed, overworked, and not apparently in very good health, he seemed in a fair way to becoming unfit to take part in public business during 1788-89. He appeared in an exceedingly unfortunate light in some events which had a little preceded the second of his long speeches in Westminster Hall. At the beginning of November 1788 it became evident that the King was out of his mind. Pitt saw himself faced with a situation unprecedented in English history, and with the prospect of having to yield place to the Prince of Wales, Fox, and the Opposition. Outside Parliament plotting was

¹ *Parliamentary History*, xxviii. 845.

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¹ *Parliamentary History*, xxviii. 845.

rampant; the Queen plotted; the various Court factions plotted; the Prince of Wales and his royal brethren conducted something like an open canvass on Fox's behalf. Inside Parliament it appeared that some of the ministerialists were preparing to desert to Carlton House 'If,' said Thurlow, who was by no means above suspicion, 'if I forget my King, may my God forget me.' 'Forget you! He'll see you d——d first', 'Forget you! the best thing that could happen to you', 'Oh, the rascal', were the exclamations that broke from the lips of Wilkes, Burke, and Pitt respectively, at this observation of the Lord Chancellor's. The Whigs meanwhile, who were counting their chickens before they were hatched, began the congenial though contentious task of Cabinet building. They were in want of a Chancellor of the Exchequer; could they find one in Burke? It was thought that they decidedly could not. The Duke of Portland, whose admiration and affection for Burke were unbounded, concerned himself most seriously with the question of how to make some suitable and permanent provision not only for Burke himself, but for Burke's wife and son. The Pay Office Burke would have as a matter of course, but that would necessarily be precarious, and Portland proposed that a pension on the Irish establishment should be granted for the lives of himself and Mrs. Burke.¹

Burke, who knew nothing of all this, had no doubt his own hopes and fears as to what he himself would get out of the scramble. He drafted, or helped to draft, a manifesto in which the Prince of Wales stated his case in reply to Pitt, but he took no part in the

¹ Sir Gilbert Elliot's *Life*, 1 260 sq.

subterranean intrigues which centred round Carlton House. He was not a *persona grata* there—how should he have been?—though he was from time to time brought into contact with a circle of which the manners and customs repelled him. Speaking in public, he felt constrained to speak of the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York as ‘the hope and pride of the nation’, and he did at one time think that the Prince of Wales had possibilities, if only he would have cultivated the society of men like Sir Gilbert Elliot. In private conversation, however, he took a less courtly tone. On one occasion, when he was called in to assist the Duke of Clarence, who wanted an increase in his allowance, ‘I vow to God, sir,’ he said, ‘I wish that, instead of writing letters of this kind, you would go every morning to breakfast with your father and mother. It is not decent for any family, but above all the Royal Family, to be at variance as you all unhappily are.’

We need not enter into the long debates which were occasioned by the Regency question as to whether the Heir-Apparent had an inherent right to become Regent automatically, or whether the consent of Parliament was necessary; whether Parliament had or had not the right to impose restrictions on the exercise of the Regent’s power; as to the means by which the Royal assent was to be accorded to an Act of Parliament constituting the Regency; as to the medical reports, as to the merits of rival physicians, and other matters. It is possible that the restrictions which Pitt proposed to place on the exercise of the Regent’s power would have been salutary; it is certain that he stated his case with a dignity and a spirit of

personal disinterestedness which should have been patent to everybody. None the less, the Opposition had perhaps a good debating case, which they proceeded to spoil by a combination of impetuosity and factiousness. Burke himself feared that the policy of Pitt lent some colour to the 'elective' as distinct from the hereditary character of the monarchy, a matter of controversy in those days which always obsessed him,¹ but he was not much consulted on the various questions that arose. This source of irritation was too much for him altogether, combined as it was with the worry of the Hastings trial and, as may be safely inferred, an only too well-grounded anxiety for the emoluments of office. Being evidently on or over the edge of what would now be called a nervous breakdown he lost his head in the debates, and that not once only but several times. It almost seemed as if the wish were father to his unconcealed opinion that the King would not recover, and in other respects also he showed himself indiscreet beyond words. Who could complain, he asked on one occasion, if some dignity were to be conferred on the house of Cavendish, or if the Marquisate of Rockingham were to be revived?—further exciting disclosures of the Whigs' intentions in the matter of peerages were drowned in the uproar that ensued. He could not control the torrent of ideas and images that surged through his brain. He compared the Lord Chancellor to what the justly pained Lord Stanhope calls 'the least decent of the heathen deities'. Ought they, he asked on another occasion, to put a crown of thorns on the head of the sick King, and a reed in his hand . . . but we need not go on.

¹ See, e.g. *Corr*, III. 399.

These outbreaks were, as was recognised at the time and as was said outright by one member in a disgraceful speech,¹ indicative of a state of mind which was one for the physician rather than the critic.²

The recovery of the King put an end to the hopes of the Opposition, and placed Pitt, deservedly, in a very strong position. Burke abstained for a while from speaking in Parliament, and there are other indications that he was himself conscious that his temper was getting the better of him. His reputation was at its nadir about 1789. His party was utterly discredited, and he had himself contributed to their discredit. His hopes of returning to the Pay Office for the third time under a regency government were utterly extinguished. He had nothing now to look forward to except years of hopeless opposition to the popular and triumphant Pitt. He saw the prospect of having, with no very cordial assistance, to bear the brunt of the endless and thankless proceedings in Westminster Hall. He was driven, for financial reasons, to beg unsuccessfully for a seat on Pitt's Board of Control for India, the result of an Act which he had himself opposed.³ His one hope and his one consolation lay

¹ *Parl Hist.*, xxvii 1248.

² Lecky's remarks (v. 131) as to these outbreaks indicating a mind 'radically diseased' seem much exaggerated. Burke was himself fully conscious of his liability to these paroxysms, which he attributes on one occasion to over-anxiety (*Corr.*, iii. 89). Their accentuation in his later years was possibly due partly to gastric troubles. The disease of which Burke died is described by Prior as 'a scirrhus affection of the stomach', but the biographer, although himself a surgeon by profession, has nothing more to say as to the medical aspect of Burke's case.

³ Sichel's *Life of Sheridan*, ii. 41, with the reference Hist. MSS. Commission, Abergavenny MSS., p. 70. As stated in the Preface I am much indebted to Mr Sichel's work for various illustrations, and also for some matter referring to Burke which he has collected.

in his son, who was beginning life as a barrister, and for whom he looked forward to a public career.

To Burke himself, or to any one who knew him at this time, few things could have seemed more improbable than the extraordinary future which was still reserved for him. A well-nigh broken man of sixty, no one could have surmised that he was still very far from having reached the full stature of his genius. Yet such was the fact. 'A new and troubled scene was to be opened' in which, to quote his own words as applied to Grenville and America, 'the highways were broken up, the floods were out, and the file afforded no precedent.' These floods were to penetrate to the inlet where Burke was lying to all appearance stranded, and to lift him to a European fame. He had felt for some time that he ought to retire from Parliament. But he had perforce to retain his seat so long as the Hastings impeachment lasted. Though he still spoke not infrequently, his great House of Commons days were drawing to an end, and the pen rather than the tongue was henceforth to be his chief mode of expression. Yet not entirely. Memories of the American War and of Burke's own prime, his passionate absorption in the tremendous events which were soon to arise, the reflected glory of his own writings thereupon, combined to invest his parliamentary appearances with a singular impressiveness to susceptible minds. Among such was that of the youthful Wordsworth, who saw Burke

old, but vigorous in age—
Stand like an oak whose stag-horn branches start
Out of its leafy brow, the more to awe
The younger brethren of the grove,

and celebrated his denunciations of 'systems built on

abstract rights' in what must be confessed to be some of the less inspired lines of the *Prelude*.

From May 1789 the eyes of Europe began to be riveted on France. The emotions of most Englishmen on hearing that the States General had met at Versailles, that the Third Estate had assumed the title of National Assembly, that the Bastille, symbol of monarchical despotism, had fallen, were those of very interested but comparatively unmoved spectators. 'Revolution' was a word of happy augury in our ears; the French seemed, so far as their inferior and excitable nature permitted, to be taking steps towards a liberty similar to that which we had so gloriously and peaceably achieved in 1688. Fox hailed the prospect with delight; Burke was very cautious and, remembering the Gordon riots, feared 'the old Parisian ferocity'.

Always anxious to repay the hospitality which he and his son had received in France, Burke kept open house for French visitors, and among them, strange to say, had been Mirabeau. There had also been a 'very young gentleman' of Anglophile tendencies called Dupont. Dupont, who was to be the nominal recipient of the most tremendous open letter ever penned, now asked Burke's opinion of the situation in France. As early as the beginning of October 1789 Burke wrote to Dupont¹ in the manner of an interested spectator, doubtful about the event, but unconcerned as to any possible effect of the Revolution on English politics. He soon heard with consternation that the King and Queen of France had been dragged from Versailles to Paris by a triumphant mob, and his

¹ *Corr.*, III. 102. See P110r 295, for Burke's first views on the Revolution. This letter is not given in his correspondence.

feelings underwent a further and a radical change as soon as it appeared that the contagion was spreading to his own country. The alarm was given by a club of middle-class nonconformist Londoners, which, since it had an entrance fee of half a guinea and a peer as chairman, would hardly have been suspected of cherishing sentiments subversive of society. An anniversary sermon had been preached before this respectable 'Society for commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain' by an eminent divine, Dr. Richard Price, and this discourse, which hailed the Revolution as the dawn of a new era of liberty for Europe and had something to say about the conduct of kings, was the spark which was to fire the greatest explosion of rhetoric, argument, and prophecy in the English language. Early in 1790, in a speech on the Army Estimates which made a great impression, Burke held that, whereas in the preceding age we had to fear the military power of France, we now had to fear the force not of her arms but of her anarchic example.¹ Events now moved quickly in France. The monarchy was still standing, and the King was a good way off his fatal attempt at flight. But the Jacobins were established in the Rue St. Honoré; the National Assembly, following the decrees of August 4, 1789, were laying the foundations of a constitution based on uniformity, decentralisation, and the sovereignty of the people; Church property was appropriated by the State and assignats issued thereupon; the emigration of the aristocrats began. An adequate review of these events was clearly needed; it was generally recognised that Burke, whatever his recent vagaries in Parliament may have been, was the

¹ *Works*, iii. 269.

proper person to undertake it ; and as soon as it was known that he was writing on the subject, high expectations were formed.¹ Throughout most of 1790 Burke was engaged in expanding his first slight letter to Dupont. In October of that year there at length appeared a portly pamphlet, stitched, after the custom of the time, in grey paper covers, and entitled *Reflections on the Revolution in France, and on the proceedings of certain societies in London relative to that event, in a letter intended to have been sent to a gentleman in Paris, by the Right Hon. Edmund Burke*. The second of the three great chapters of Burke's public life had reached its essential though by no means its actual conclusion with the appearance of Warren Hastings at the bar of the House of Lords ; the third chapter now begins.

¹ An announcement appeared in the *London Chronicle* for February 16, 1790. ' In the press and will speedily be published, Reflections on certain proceedings of the Revolution Society of the 4th November 1789 concerning the affairs of France ' Payne's note in Clarendon Press edition of the *Reflections*, pp. 296-97 This earlier title is significant of Burke's real intention.

CHAPTER X

'REFLECTIONS ON THE FRENCH REVOLUTION'

(1790)

THE history of the French Revolution in England, it has been said, 'begins with a sermon and ends with a poem',¹ the sermon being Dr Price's discourse to the English Revolution Society on 'The Love of our Country', and the poem being Shelley's *Hellas*. Burke's work partakes of the nature of both a sermon and a poem; even those who like it least would probably admit its unlikeness to anything else in English literature. Political philosophy, political economy, constitutional argument, emotional appeal, declamatory magnificence are combined in a manner which does not seem incongruous for the reason that each in turn is felt to be the genuine expression of what has been well termed 'an extraordinary mind working at an extraordinary crisis'. The book is certainly not a model of composition in the larger sense, having grown along with its subject, and consisting of two or three large fragments. However, the impressions which the *Reflections* convey of spontaneity, of the whole man

¹ Brailsford, *Shelley, Godwin, and their Circle*, p. 7, to which the general reader may be referred for further information about Dr. Price and his sermon.

pouring himself out on paper, of a mind striking sparks from innumerable occasions of contact with a great and a complex situation, are among the chief ingredients of their power. As the editor of the admirable Clarendon Press edition points out, the work loses rather than gains by attempts at consecutive analysis.

The transformation of France which was now in course of being accomplished had, it appeared, met with the approval of a section of English opinion, and that section was headed by some eminent persons who called themselves Whigs. Burke was accordingly extremely concerned to show that this opinion was entirely unrepresentative of that of the majority of Englishmen. For this purpose it was necessary to examine the proceedings of the National Assembly, to illustrate the utter incompatibility of their spirit with the ideas held, consciously or unconsciously, articulately or inarticulately, by the mass of the English people. Englishmen have never found it easy to express in public their deepest feelings on Church, State, or anything else ; but Burke, well as he understood the English character, was not an Englishman. John Bull is made to confess the faith that is in him through Burke’s ample utterance as through a megaphone ; an Englishman, perhaps, could hardly have written some portions of the *Reflections*.

The canons which he proposed to apply to the proceedings of the National Assembly Burke explains clearly and almost at once. He was, he says, inclined to suspend his congratulations on the newly-won liberty of France until he had been informed ‘ how it had been combined with government ; with public force ; with the discipline and obedience of armies ; with .

the collection of an effective and well-distributed revenue ; with morality and religion ; with the solidity of property ; with peace and order ; with civil and social manners ; all these (in their way) are good things too, and without them liberty is not a benefit whilst it lasts, and is not likely to continue long'. We note the sound concrete foundation which Burke here lays for a work which has often been accused of betraying an excessive sentimentalism, an almost dilettante affection for the whole apparatus of mediæval lumber which was to be consumed in the flames of the Revolution. The work does indeed provide the most splendid literary illustration of the organic connection of the past and the present life of institutions, the most powerful vindication of those human sentiments which crave that government should be embodied in visible and appealing symbols, the most impressive warning that a State which starves the imagination of its citizens does so at its peril. But Burke was far too business-like to be absorbed by considerations of that character. A large portion of the book is devoted to an examination of the financial and legislative proceedings of the National Assembly, an examination which may be defective in point of information, but is certainly not defective in practical intention. The new government, he was convinced, would not pay its way ; it would go bankrupt. The exciting effect of political experimentation on a large scale was exceedingly bad for industry. Criticism of this kind may be the least interesting portion of a work which is now of very unequal interest, but it is important to note its existence.

Nor is it only the French portions of the *Reflections*

which are weighted with obsolete matter. Burke's arguments as to the nature of the English Constitution were necessarily expressed partly in terms that have ceased to live, in terms of the Revolution of 1688, in the conception of our ‘ liberties ’ as being an ‘ inheritance from the past ’, in the highest Tory ideal of the connection of the Church with the State. It is unfortunate that the first thirty or forty pages of the book are entirely of this character. Dr. Price, for all Burke's gibes, was a man of European reputation in his day, but his sermon was hardly worth the tremendous advertisement which this refutation conferred upon it.

As soon as he has done splitting hairs with Dr. Price on questions of whether the legislation which regulated the Protestant succession gave us a ‘ right to choose our governors ’, and to ‘ cashier kings for misconduct ’, Burke rises easily and naturally to the heights.¹ The continuity of English institutions is ‘ the effect of following Nature, which is wisdom without reflection, and above it. . . . People will not look forward to posterity who never look backward to their ancestors.’ France might—and it shows how Burke misunderstood the causes as distinct from the results of the Revolution—have proceeded as we proceeded in 1688. The National Assembly was from its composition, which Burke analyses, utterly unfit to undertake the anyhow impossible task of framing a constitution *a priori*. In the constitution which they had formed they had neglected property and neglected birth, both of which, as well as ability, were qualifications for exercising governmental power. (‘ The characteristic essence of

¹ *Works*, II 307 to about 369.

property . . . is to be unequal. . . . It is said that twenty-four millions ought to prevail over two hundred thousand. True, if the constitution of a kingdom is a problem of Arithmetic.') The 'metaphysical rights of man' as enumerated by the Assembly were totally different from the 'real rights of men'. ('If civil society be made for the advantage of man, all the advantages for which it is made become his rights. It is an institution of beneficence, and law is only beneficence acting by rule . . . in this partnership [*i.e.* society], all men have equal rights but not to equal things.')

Triumphant Jacobinism has outraged human nature in its politics, and, whatever Dr. Price may say, has, by its treatment of the Royal Family, outraged certain feelings which it is very important not to banish from European civilisation. These feelings, under the name of chivalry, still influence Englishmen, and are feelings to which neither ancient nor contemporary Eastern civilisations furnish any real parallel. A change indeed had overtaken Marie Antoinette since Burke had seen her years before, 'glittering like the morning star, full of hope, and splendour and joy'.¹ The feelings with which we contemplate such a dramatic reversal of fortune have a moral value; it is a philosophy as unnatural as barbarous which tears off 'all the decent

¹ Horace Walpole (*Letters*, xiv 329, Toynbee's edition) affords an unexpected testimony to the substratum of fact which always underlay Burke's rhapsodies. 'I know the tirade on the Queen of France is condemned, and yet I must own I admire it much. It paints her exactly as she appeared to me the first time I saw her when Dauphiness. She . . . shot through the room like an aerial being . . .' The hard-headed Francis wrote to Burke that the description was 'pure foppery', and Richard Burke had to intervene between his aggrieved father and the critic. Burke declared he was moved to tears when writing it

drapery of life ’ and leaves nothing that ‘ engages the affections on behalf of the commonwealth ’. In any case, Louis XVI. was no tyrant, and Englishmen are prejudiced against revolutions. (‘ Prejudice is of ready application to the emergency ; it previously engages the mind in a steady course of wisdom and virtue, and does not leave the man hesitating in the moment of decision, sceptical, puzzled and unresolved. Prejudice renders a man’s virtue his habit. . . . ’¹)

The orator, for such he is throughout, then proceeds to contrast the political and religious sentiments of Englishmen with those displayed by the National Assembly. He does so in some of the most glowing pages that even he ever wrote, pages of which the essential message is not affected by the highest Tory conception of the Church of England. The crucially important measures taken by the National Assembly against the French Church, which he denounces with all his might, suggest a contrast with the proud and prosperous position of our own Church, ‘ exalting her mitred front in Courts and Parliaments ’. The Church illustrates the continuity of tradition that operates in other spheres, in law, in the arts, in letters and in all the achievements of civilisation, the spiritual links which bind one generation to another. No one generation has the right to act as if it alone were the master of the national destiny, of which it is the essence to be continuous. The State, according to the true conception of the Social Contract, depends upon the Divine will, and is ‘ a partnership in all service, a

¹ Cf *Letter to William Smith, Esq, Works*, vi. 52 ‘ If anything is . . . out of the power of man it is to create a prejudice. Somebody has said that a king may make a nobleman but he cannot make a gentleman.’

partnership in all art, a partnership in every virtue, and in all perfection. As the ends of such a partnership cannot be obtained in many generations, it becomes a partnership, not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born '¹

In what form of government had the destruction of the previous government in France issued? It professed to be a pure democracy, though it seemed likely to become 'a mischievous and ignoble oligarchy'. What then did Burke chiefly fear in democracy? He leaves us in no doubt on that point,—its tendency to party tyranny. 'Of this I am certain, that in a democracy, the majority of the citizens is capable of exercising the most cruel oppression upon the minority, wherever strong divisions prevail in that kind of polity, as they often must.' The most deadening oppression that can be exercised upon any man is that exercised by a conspiracy of his own equals. In direct opposition to the policy of the National Assembly lay that of a wise conservatism ('A disposition to preserve, and an ability to improve, taken together, would be my standard of a statesman'). That the statesman can only use the material which he finds to hand may be a commonplace, but commonplaces cease to be commonplaces when they pass through minds of Burke's order. This we see, for example, in the following passage,

¹ Cf. *Second Letter on a Regicide Peace*, *Works*, v 254. 'The British state is, without question, that which pursues the greatest variety of ends and is the least disposed to sacrifice any of them to another or to the whole. It aims at taking in the entire circle of human desires . . . Personal liberty, which in other European countries has rather arisen from the system of manners . . . in England has been a direct object of government.' The whole passage is reminiscent of Montesquieu, from whom the last phrase is taken (*Esprit*, xi 7)

whatever we may think of the particular instance. It would be hard to find a better illustration of the generalising energy of Burke’s mind when working on a particular situation, or, from the literary point of view, of his habit of elaborating a metaphor, of blending it with a train of argument, and of concluding by an aphorism or an illustration which clinches the whole.

There are moments in the fortunes of states, when particular men are called to make improvements, by great mental exertion. In these moments, even when they seem to enjoy the confidence of their prince and country, and to be invested with full authority, they have not always apt instruments. A politician, to do great things, looks for a *power*, what our workmen call a *purchase*; and if he finds that power, in politics as in mechanics, he cannot be at a loss to apply it. In the monastic institutions, in my opinion, was found a great *power* for the mechanism of politic benevolence. There were revenues with a public direction; there were men wholly set apart and dedicated to public purposes, without any other than public ties and public principles; men without the possibility of converting the estate of the community into a private fortune; men denied to self-interests, whose avarice is for some community; men to whom personal poverty is honour, and implicit obedience stands in the place of freedom. In vain shall a man look to the possibility of making such things when he wants them. The winds blow as they list. These institutions are the products of enthusiasm; they are the instruments of wisdom. Wisdom cannot create materials; they are the gifts of nature or of chance; her pride is in the use. The perennial existence of bodies corporate and their fortunes are things particularly suited to a man who has long views; who meditates designs that require time in fashioning, and which propose duration when they are accomplished. He is not deserving to rank high, or even to be mentioned in the order of great statesmen, who, having obtained the command and direction of such a power as existed in the wealth, the discipline, and.

the habits of such corporations, as those which you have rashly destroyed, cannot find any way of converting it to the great and lasting benefit of his country. On the view of this subject, a thousand uses suggest themselves to a contriving mind. To destroy any power, growing wild from the rank productive force of the human mind, is almost tantamount, in the moral world, to the destruction of the apparently active properties of bodies in the material. It would be like the attempt to destroy (if it were in our competence to destroy) the expansive force of fixed air in nitre, or the power of steam, or of electricity, or of magnetism. These energies always existed in nature, and they were always discernible. They seemed, some of them unserviceable, some noxious, some no better than a sport to children; until contemplative ability, combining with practic skill, tamed their wild nature, subdued them to use, and rendered them at once the most powerful and the most tractable agents in subservience to the great views and designs of men. Did fifty thousand persons, whose mental and whose bodily labour you might direct, and so many hundred thousand a year of a revenue, which was neither lazy nor superstitious, appear too big for your abilities to wield? Had you no way of using the men but by converting monks into pensioners? Had you no way of turning the revenue to account, but through the improvident resource of a spendthrift sale? If you were thus destitute of mental funds, the proceeding is in its natural course. Your politicians do not understand their trade; and, therefore they sell their tools¹

Visibly pausing for a moment to take breath,² Burke tells us that, but for considerations of time and space, he would have undertaken a more detailed comparison of the two contrasted constitutions; as it is, he proceeds to some fuller criticism of the actual measures of the National Assembly. 'Those who attempt to level never equalise,' and that the levelling operation would be fatal to the natural play of life was his

¹ *Works*, II. 428.

² *Works*, II. 434.

especial fear. He was convinced that normal human nature, unless stimulated by indoctrination or by cruelty of circumstance, is not inclined to rebel against social or financial inequalities. Human nature, again, strikes deep local roots. The sinking of all local attachments, which he quite erroneously supposed would be the consequence of the division of France into the Departments that replaced the old Provinces, gives occasion to some famous reflections.

No man ever was attached by a sense of pride, partiality, or real affection, to a description of square measurement. He never will glory in belonging to the Checquer No. 71 or to any other badge ticket. We begin our public affections in our families. No cold relation is a zealous citizen. We pass on to our neighbourhood and our habitual provincial connections.

Hatred and fear are powerful incentives to prediction, and the famous forecast in the following passage is necessarily connected with Burke's argument.¹

In the weakness of one kind of authority, and in the fluctuation of all, the officers of an army will remain for some time mutinous and full of faction, until some popular general, who understands the art of conciliating the soldiery, and who possesses the true spirit of command, shall draw the eyes of all men upon himself. Armies will obey him on his personal account. There is no other way of securing military obedience in this state of things. But the moment in which that event shall happen, the person who really commands the army is your master ; the master (that is

¹ It has perhaps been overpraised. Burke was very possibly thinking of some generalisations of Montesquieu as to the kind of situation which calls forth a Napoleon ; see *Esprit*, viii. 8. With some of Burke's comments on a later stage of the Revolution cf. *Grandeur et Décadence*, xi., where Montesquieu quotes examples from history to show that civil war was compatible with external aggression.

little) of your king, the master of your Assembly, the master of your whole republic.

On the same note of forecast the book ends :

I have told you candidly my sentiments I think they are not likely to alter yours. I do not know that they ought. You are young ; you cannot guide, but must follow the fortune of your country But hereafter they may be of some use to you, in some future form which your commonwealth may take. In the present it can hardly remain ; but before its final settlement it may be obliged to pass, as one of our poets says, ' through great varieties of untried being,' and in all its transmigrations to be purified by fire and blood.

The whole of Burke lies in the *Reflections*, all his power of expression, all his capacity for emotion, all the innate practicality which is barely concealed by the imaginative splendour of his rhetoric, all his political philosophy. His formal principles, around which there crystallises a philosophy that extends far beyond them, remain essentially the same. In the arguments with Dr. Price as to the source and nature of monarchical authority in England we find, indeed, that he changes the emphasis from the popular to the monarchical side. Otherwise, there is the belief in the peculiar virtues of the British constitutional balance, a suspicion of democratic agitation, a desire that there should be an upward path, not too broad, for unendowed ability, a glorification of cautious reform—aristocratic Whiggery, in short, not essentially modified by a very un-Whiggish conception of the Church of England as sanctifying the State. The work is dominated by the idea that a civilised European nation, and the English nation in particular, is, and

must be, a whole of distinct but mutually related classes, and that its government must be a complex of distinct but mutually related organs. Royalty and aristocracy had been in France, and were at that time in England, elements of real power in the State, and the French aristocracy, in the days of the grand tour, was linked by numerous ties to that of our own country. These elements were now being destroyed in France; it seemed that they might possibly be threatened in England; and Burke was concerned to throw his weight accordingly. He was not, after all, a closet philosopher, but an active man of affairs, living in particular relations with particular people. He was in sympathy with the political aristocracy with whom he had allied himself, and he shared the idea, common in his day, that the art of government was mainly an aristocratic art ¹

Sympathy is, however, a mild word to use in any connection with the *Reflections*. The curious contrast, which we have remarked before, between the character of the doctrines expounded and the temperament of the expositor strikes us here again, and most forcibly ‘ Zeal,’ says Swift, ‘ is never so highly obliged as when you set it a tearing.’ But here we have a moderate conservatism defended with a zeal which is more generally found associated with the visionary or the iconoclast, a position which is mainly and at bottom one of a cool realism urged with every resource of a prophetic eloquence. It is probable, indeed, that nothing lower than the highest emotional temperature would have sufficed to fuse the diversified matter of

¹ See, *e.g.* Corr iii 388 *sq.*, where Burke emphasises the aristocratic character of the Whig party.

the work into something like consistency. This element in the *Reflections* was happily characterised by a contemporary critic in referring to their 'virulent encomiums on urbanity and inflammatory harangues against violence'. But the impact of such a phenomenon as the Revolution on such a mind as Burke's was bound to generate heat, and, assuming the presence of some other necessary qualities, an intense and pervading emotion does after all help to keep a book alive. Burke was indeed needlessly provocative in saying with the greatest emphasis things that it is better not to say. No honest occupation is disgraceful, but all occupations are not *honourable*. 'The occupation of a hair-dresser, or of a working tallow chandler, cannot be a matter of honour to any person.' He expressed in one unfortunate instance the fear that 'learning would be cast into the mire and trodden under the hoofs of a swinish multitude'. It was in vain that he explained that he was thinking not of the innocent English pig, but of the 'wild boar of the Gallic forest'. The phrase—which he refused to withdraw—was bound to stick; *An Address to the Hon. Edmund Burke from the Svinish Multitude* was only one of the pamphlets which it elicited, and angry indiscretions of this kind did undoubted harm to the subsequent influence of the book. Nor was its tone exactly likely to recommend it to the country to which it was nominally addressed, where it was speedily translated and widely read. Burke was talking to France plainly and for her good, and in a manner admirably calculated to exasperate French patriotism; the book's other qualities need not blind us to the sublimity of its unconscious arrogance. However,

this attitude of lofty patronage was by no means confined to Burke. As he justly pointed out, for the French to be represented by their English apologists and admirers as ‘ a gang of Maroon slaves, suddenly broke loose from the house of bondage ’, and not knowing what to do with their newly acquired freedom, was not a compliment either.

Burke, although he had read a great deal about France, did not know the country well, and he certainly knew little of the French character. He never, practically speaking, attempts to discuss why the Revolution happened, or to mark the stage at which the series of events which began with the meeting of the States General became a revolution. That he misunderstood the genesis of the Revolution, that he shut his eyes to such of its causes as were economic, that he ignored the fair intentions of the National Assembly and the constructive reforms which it was in course of achieving, these things are the common-places of criticism. It is true that, apart from the wealth of incidental reflection contained in them, some portions of the *Reflections* are vitiated by misconception and imperfect information. On the other hand, Burke’s real purpose must be remembered. He had not set out to write a disquisition on France, but a warning to England. No doubt, as event followed event in France while Burke was composing the *Reflections*, their centre of interest shifted, but their original purpose, as evinced by their original title, remained. He takes his stand, as always, on the accomplished fact. The Revolution had happened; what were we to think of it, and in what was it likely to result? In this last respect at least, Burke’s

severest critics cannot deny him the gift of foresight. But if, again, the English character was after all as different from the French as Burke makes out, if the sentiments of the English people were actually such as he ascribed to them, were they in any danger of infection? To use his own comparison, the crickets would have continued to chirp unharmed and unharmed while the oxen browsed under the oaks. He has, however, his answer ready, and it is implicit in a striking phrase which he uses elsewhere, viz. 'the fortitude of rational fear'. The least possibility of danger to the essence of the English tradition in politics and society was sufficient to arouse the wise timorousness of a statesmanlike mind. However, for the moment not even he could claim that there was any danger that called for drastic action.

There is again—it is also a familiar line of criticism—something symptomatic in Burke's concern for the royal actors on the French scene. We recall a well-known passage on this point in Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*:

Not one glance of compassion, not one commiserating reflection that I can find throughout his book, has Mr. Burke bestowed on those who lingered out the most wretched of lives—a life without hope—in the most miserable of prisons. . . . He is not affected by the reality of distress, but by the shadowy resemblance of it striking his imagination; pities the plumage, but forgets the dying bird.

It is strange to find the champion of 'trampled Hindostan' accused of an indifference to the suffering of those who could not protect themselves. It is strange also that Paine should not have remarked Burke's

incidental recognition of a social problem which, he informs us, he had meditated long and deeply, and which he had in fact remarked upon in an exceedingly powerful passage of the first work that he ever published.¹ Here also he refers to those who ‘ worked from dawn to dark in the innumerable servile, degrading, unseemly, unmanly, and often most unwholesome and pestiferous occupations to which by the social economy so many wretches are inevitably doomed ’. Humanity, and perhaps policy, would justify their rescue far more than it would have justified the destruction of the religious orders in France. He seems to regard the phenomenon as inevitable, but, if he had lived to see more than the grim beginnings of modern industrialism, he might have denounced it with all the fervour of denunciation that Carlyle or Ruskin poured upon its less mitigated period.

It was indeed inevitable, and it is a testimony to the essential balance of Burke’s mind, that he should have been charged at one time, as in the matter of Warren Hastings, with being too humanitarian, and at another time, as when he called for war with France, with not being humanitarian enough. The strict relevance of the above type of criticism must depend on the part which was really played in the genesis of the Revolution by ‘ the dumb misery of the peasants ’, a matter which, even if the present writer were in the least competent to discuss it, would form no subject for cursory discussion. But it may be said that Paine, whether or not he hits the actual mark, does strike a shrewd blow here,

¹ *Vindication of Natural Society* (*Works*, 1 42). The passage is given in Moiley’s *Burke*, p. 16, and in Mr. Hughes’ volume of selections.

and that Burke's general attitude towards the Revolution shows another aspect of the temperamental deficiency which vitiated his conception of Warren Hastings. It was not merely that he could not look without horror on a movement which was sweeping away all the known landmarks of an ancient civilisation. Fervid as was his temperament, and impassioned as was his oratory, if there was one thing with which he always failed to sympathise, it was with the passions of insurgent humanity. He was, it may be said, an orthodox eighteenth-century Whig at bottom, however much else he was also. To the Americans, Whigs like himself, arguing decorously on a constitutional principle and then proceeding to fight for it, he could extend a very practical sympathy.¹ But the prophet of an ordered constitutionalism and of a settled civilisation could see no good and no hope in a vast upheaval of popular passion. That he was witnessing the greatest manifestation of human energy in modern history he recognised indeed when the time came. But, a critic may urge, the nobler hopes which inspired some portion of that energy, the hopes which saw the earth transformed under the radiance of an idea, he could never have seen. His diagnosis of the causes which led to the Revolution might, if he had seriously attempted to provide one, have been as inadequate, and in much the same respect, as Gibbon's diagnosis of the rise of the Christian religion.—It may be so, but, on the other hand, it may not. We must remember again that Burke's primary concern now and in the future lay not with France, but with England, and it is difficult indeed

¹ Mr. Guedalla, in a recent essay on Burke, has made a similar remark

to say what, had his immediate purpose been different, and had he been better informed about France itself, he might or might not have achieved. A critic who undertakes to pronounce dogmatically on this head must have obtained a clearer idea than the present biographer of what were, up to the last phase of his life, the limitations of Burke's mind and sympathy.

No misunderstandings or misconceptions of the contemporary situation can interfere with the permanent value of the reflections to which it prompted Burke. They go to the roots, and the differences of opinion which they evoke must always be fundamental until active political discussion is silenced. In spite of every historical change, the questions raised by Burke's titanic challenge to the Revolution are still living, nor is the debate of which he and Rousseau were the original protagonists yet concluded. The work has been pronounced, by a high authority in our own day, to be the literary origin of the modern Conservative party; of all the innumerable posthumous tributes which Burke has received, that would no doubt have pleased him most. But, though predominantly an expression of political conservatism, the work is of the seminal kind in which men of all creeds and parties have found inspiration. The historian finds in it the earliest estimate of the tremendous forces which the Revolution was unchaining; a work which was, and is, a dividing signal, which changed opinion and broke up a great political party. The principle of historic reference, the conception of political phenomena as conditioned by historic antecedents, implicit in Burke's previous works, is deepened in correspondence with an infinitely more important emergency. The

leading direction of some great currents of thought which were to move the intellectual life of the succeeding century is unmistakably indicated. Government, law, and, as Burke implies, all the higher activities of man, are justified, not according to any *a priori* assumptions or any process of dialectic, but according to the facts of human nature. They have their roots in human instincts ;¹ they provide the path along which human nature finds its sanest development, the institutions which embody them have arisen in response to human needs. The social psychologist also finds in the *Reflections* the first English work which allows for the existence of his own field of study, an explicit recognition of those non-rational motives which actuate men in society, a reasoned protest against attempts at an undue simplification of human nature in politics.

The *Reflections* are, in their essence, a prophecy rather than a diagnosis. Unlike some other political thinkers who were also men of affairs, unlike Bacon or More, Burke was never tempted to frame a Utopia. Utopias have often been disguised programmes of social reform, and Burke, though eager enough to correct what seemed to him obvious abuses in the existing political order, was by no means a social reformer. Nevertheless, an ideal strain is distinctly audible throughout the *Reflections*, however closely they may be engaged with the occasion that gave them birth. Burke was not a visionary, but he saw, as did Plato, his own vision of social righteousness embodied in a commonwealth. To compare Burke with Plato would be unreasonable and impossible. But Plato's greatest

¹ See especially *Works*, ii. 333, 363

work was also, as it seems, in part a ‘ tract for the times ’, and it is not altogether fanciful to detect an underlying affinity of spirit between the serene detachment of the *Republic* and the combative ardour of the *Reflections*. Burke believed that ‘ the state of civil society . . . is a state of nature, and much more truly so than a savage and incoherent mode of life ’, and that ‘ all human laws are, properly speaking, only declaratory ; they may alter the mode and application, but have no power over the substance of original justice ’. But his ideal state is not fashioned ‘ after a pattern laid up in heaven ’ ; it is based rather on the solid earth of the England that he knew. Its guardian principle resides neither in an isolated class of philosophic rulers, nor in a single assembly of virtuous and perfected citizens, but in Crown, Church, Lords, and Commons. It is an English ideal ; it, or something like it, is still cherished by many people ; it may not be the best thing imaginable by the mind of man, but it is our own.

CHAPTER XI

AFTER THE 'REFLECTIONS'—RUPTURE WITH FOX

(1791)

FEW works of the kind have had so instantaneous a success as the *Reflections*. Old booksellers said that they remembered nothing like it for a book priced at five shillings; seven thousand copies were sold in six days. Even in India, where the accuser of Warren Hastings was not popular, two editions were sold in a month. In France it was translated by Dupont, not to mention a private version made by Louis XVI. himself. The chief crowned heads of Europe sent compliments through their ambassadors, and King Stanislaus of Poland sent a large gold medal. In Parliament Burke's position remained much what it had been, except that Pitt was noticeably civil. The Prince of Wales, indeed, expressed displeasure that the author had not dragged in by the heels a reference to his inherent right to the regency, but by the King Burke's opposition to prerogative and his championship of the rebellious colonists were forgotten and forgiven. 'Read it,' said his Majesty to those about him; 'it will do you good, do you good; it is a book which every gentleman ought to read.' The publication of the *Reflections* changed Burke's position completely in the eyes of

the general public. Even if the work did not exert much immediate and direct influence on politics, Burke was now representing the majority of the nation in a manner that he had never done before

Taking advantage of some corrections received from a sympathetic French source, Burke lost no time in following up the *Reflections*. The comparatively brief *Letter to a Member of the National Assembly* (1791) contains a suggestion that foreign intervention might be necessary in the affairs of France, and also a bitter attack on Rousseau, whose unethical sentimentalism repelled Burke profoundly. He was naturally unwilling to comply with his correspondent's suggestion that he should put forward a plan of his own for dealing with the situation in France. 'I must see with mine own eyes. I must, in a manner, touch with my own hands, not only the fixed but the momentary circumstances, before I could venture to suggest any political project whatever. I must know the power and disposition to accept, to execute, to persevere. . . . I must see the things: I must see the means.'

Burke now stopped writing on the Revolution for a space. There was nothing more to be done for the moment, and, though his overflowing mind made it difficult for him to stop writing or speaking when once he had started, he was never given to writing for writing's sake. Besides, there was a task to be accomplished which lay nearer to his heart than anything which had as yet emanated from France, and that was the impeachment of Warren Hastings. By the end of 1790, out of the twenty articles of impeachment, no more than four and part of a fifth

had been dealt with even by the prosecution ; while the defence had not been heard at all. Having been born under post-diluvial conditions, neither judges, nor accusers, nor accused seemed likely to live to the end of it, and, with the consent of all parties, the Managers dropped some of the charges. Various attempts were made from time to time to stop the ordeal to which Hastings seemed likely to be subjected year after year with an appalling regularity, and, shortly after the publication of the *Reflections*, the matter came up for several full-dress debates in the House of Commons. A substantial body of legal opinion held that the impeachment was ' abated ' by the dissolution of the Parliament under which it had been instituted. ' What ! ' said Burke, on hearing Erskine's pronouncement to that effect, ' a *novi prius* lawyer give an opinion on an impeachment ! As well might a rabbit, that breeds fifty times in the year, pretend to understand the gestation of an elephant.'¹ The opposition of Pitt, Fox, and Burke on the constitutional and other aspects of the question was successful, and the trial continued to drag itself wearily and majestically along. In 1790, the third year of the impeachment, the Court had sat fourteen days, in 1791 it was to sit for five days only, in 1792 for twenty-two days, and the end was even then far from being in sight. The records of the trial from start to finish sadden any admirer of Burke with a sense of the vast and largely futile effort to which he devoted himself with an absolute devotion. Four volumes of the very thickest are devoted to the speeches alone ; the evidence, oral and documentary, is stated to fill nine

¹ Moore's *Diary*, II. 203.

folio volumes ; the summarised account of the trial, as published from time to time during its progress, fills some seven hundred and fifty double-column pages of the smallest print ;¹ there are, in addition, records of the discussions between the counsel on both sides which have mercifully been left in their original repositories. The volumes first mentioned have certainly the interest of providing copious specimens of eighteenth-century eloquence taken down as actually spoken ; otherwise, the vastness of this and of the other material may have some bearing on the fact that there has been no really large scale biography of Warren Hastings since the apparently unsatisfactory work reviewed by Macaulay over eighty years ago. Seldom indeed can such an expenditure of ability and effort have resulted in a verdict which settled so little as to the real issue. But the vision of a purified Indian administration, with which he had identified his task, was before Burke's eyes, and he struggled doggedly on.

His task, difficult anyhow, had not been made easier by the estrangement from himself of two important coadjutors. The Whig party had, as we have seen, been deservedly discredited by the behaviour of its leaders on the Regency question, and the French Revolution was to weaken it still further. In February 1790, on the occasion when a debate on the army estimates had led to Burke's earliest public utterance on the Revolution, the first of several Homeric contests took place in parliament. So far as Burke and Fox were concerned, the first round was accompanied by an exchange of magnificent compliments. Such was

¹ Completed in 1796 and published by Debrett. There is a copy in the London Library with the pages numbered by hand.

Mr. Fox's sense of Mr. Burke's judgement, such his knowledge of his principles, such his value for them, and such the estimation in which he held his friendship, that if he were to put all the political information he had acquired from books, from reasoning, and from knowledge of the world and its affairs into one scale, and the improvement which he had derived from his right honourable friend's instruction and conversation in the other, he would be at a loss to say which would preponderate. In Mr. Burke's opinion, Mr. Fox had a great and masterly understanding and the greatest possible degree of natural moderation. He was of the most artless, candid, open, and benevolent disposition ; he was disinterested in the extreme , of a temper mild and placable even to a fault ; without one drop of gall in his whole constitution. The severance of a limb from Mr. Burke's body would not inflict greater pain than a public and violent difference of opinion with his right honourable friend. With Mr. Sheridan it was a different matter. Mr. Sheridan certainly paid high compliments to Mr. Burke's general principles, but said that he could not conceive how it was possible for a person who possessed such principles, or who valued our Constitution and revered the revolution which obtained it for us, to unite with such feelings an indignant and unqualified abhorrence of all the proceedings of the patriotic party in France. He conceived theirs to be as just a revolution as ours, proceeding upon as sound a principle, and a greater provocation. Mr. Sheridan, however, in Mr. Burke's unexpressed though not unconcealed opinion, embodied an altogether lower type of the human species than Mr. Fox, and, moreover, he evidently meant

to quarrel. Mr. Burke declared that henceforth he and Mr. Sheridan were entirely separated in their politics.

The following month Fox moved unsuccessfully for a repeal of the Test Acts, which required persons accepting public offices to receive the sacrament according to the rites of the Church of England. Burke said that if the present motion had been made earlier, he would have supported it, but as it was he must decline to do so. Fox said that, though Burke owned every doctrine which he had laid down, Burke's speech filled him with ' grief and shame '. It was the same, we may add, two years later, when Fox unsuccessfully attempted to procure the repeal of certain statutes directed against the Unitarians. Burke's views on religious toleration were not, generally speaking, in advance of those of his age. Government, as representing society, had, in his view, a general superintending control ' over all the actions and all the publicly propagated doctrines of men, without which it could never adequately provide for all the wants of society ', the Unitarians had promulgated doctrines hostile to religious establishments in general and that of the Church of England in particular; he could not consent at that time to recognise a hitherto unrecognised corporation avowedly subversive of the existing order in Church and State.¹

With the publication of the *Reflections* and the succeeding pamphlet the rift between Burke and Fox widened. An historic rupture of an historic association

¹ *Works*, vi 113 sq. Lecky has devoted some pages to a consideration of Burke's speech on the Unitarians in connection with the contemporary attitude towards religious legislation, v. 174 sq. (Cabinet edition).

was soon to be consummated in an oratorical battle of giants, waged amidst scenes of extraordinary excitement. Paris seemed to have communicated some of her own fevered spirit to our own more sober assembly. Much of the language in which were clothed differences of opinion and sentiment as profound as any that can divide men may seem to us to be stilted, but it was sincerely uttered, in accordance with the taste and conventions of the time. Beneath the dusty and abbreviated records of the debates which took place in April and May 1791 we can still feel the surge and throb of great emotions, greatly expressed, and expressed, at the crisis, simply and feelingly by one of the chief actors.

Burke was determined to explain and justify to the House of Commons his attitude towards the Revolution, but an opportunity did not readily present itself. On the introduction of a bill to provide a Constitution for the province of Quebec, Fox stated that France had 'erected a government from which neither insult nor injustice was to be dreaded, and that it was the most stupendous and glorious edifice of liberty which had been erected on the foundation of human integrity in any time or country'. Burke rose at once, but Fox's adherents raised cries of 'Quebec', and he could not get a hearing. The two men still appeared to be anxious to avoid an open breach. Burke told Fox that he meant to explain his position in the impending debate on the recommitment of the Quebec Bill, and, on the day appointed, they walked down together to the House of Commons for the last time. On arriving there, Burke found that steps had been taken to prevent him from introducing

the topic of the Revolution, and he returned to Beaconsfield for the Easter recess in a state of much discontent.

After the recess his opportunity came. On May 6, 1791, the Quebec Bill came up in Committee, and some latitude for general discussion might therefore be claimed. It was a question, Burke asserted, of framing a new constitution for a French colony under English rule, and was that constitution, he asked in effect, to be one in accordance with the spirit of the National Assembly? But he had not proceeded far before he was interrupted by cries of ' Order '. Fox said that Burke could hardly be held to be out of order, as it seemed to be a day of privilege, and Burke might just as well have discussed the ' Gentoo government or that of China, or of Turkey, or the laws of Confucius '. The clamour grew louder ; the groundlings took their cue from their leaders ; and they interrupted Burke no less than eight times. Facing them with unutterable scorn he hurled at them the cry of the maddened Lear :

The little dogs and all,
Tray, Blanche, and Sweetheart, see they bark at me !

The debate turned for a time on the question of relevance. But the contending passions of the two principal actors would not be denied their outlet ; the Speaker seemed to have abdicated ; and the eyes of all became riveted on Burke and Fox. Fox, when excited, was no more an observer of times and seasons than Burke himself. In a manner which Burke at any rate thought exceedingly provocative, he recalled various incidents of Burke's life, including private conversations, and urged the charge of inconsistency. Was

not Burke now contradicting his own great precept, urged in his more reasonable years, and himself framing an indictment against a whole people? Burke was stung to the quick, but at first he endeavoured to put some restraint on the morbid excitement which was overcoming him. He opened quietly enough, but, before he had ended, his hearers witnessed an explosion of feeling, expressed in heightened and impassioned language, to which the oldest among them could remember no parallel. At one point he suddenly checked himself, and turned to the Speaker with the words, 'I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and soberness'. At another point, as he was dilating on the difference between the British and the French Constitutions,¹ he was angered to see Fox apparently fulfilling a previous threat of leaving the House, a band of Fox's followers rose also, but it was a false alarm, Fox returned immediately, eating an orange. Burke went on to recall the circumstances of a friendship of twenty-five years' standing, a friendship which had never been clouded by certain political differences. Old as he was, if he had to choose between loss of friends and loss of his principles, he would choose, and with his last words exclaim, 'Fly from the French constitution'. Fox was now really alarmed. Leaning across to Burke he whispered, 'There can be no loss of friends'. Burke paused a moment, and then faced Fox relentlessly. There *was* a loss of friends: he

¹ In considering Burke's perpetual references in these and other debates to the 'British Constitution' we must remember he was all the time thinking of the principles underlying it. The theory of the *Reflections* was 'a theory drawn from the fact of a government. They who oppose it are bound to show that his (i.e. Burke's) theory militates with that fact' (*Works*, III 110)

knew the price of his conduct ; he had done his duty at the price of his friend : their friendship was at an end. He proceeded on a note of grave warning to the two rivals, each so much younger than himself, who divided between them the allegiance of the House. In a tone which, overstrained as it sounds to-day, must have been extraordinarily impressive in an atmosphere so highly charged with emotion, he exhorted Fox and Pitt, ' whether they hereafter moved in the political hemisphere as two flaming meteors, or walked together as brethren hand in hand, that they should save the Constitution of England '. To God alone belonged the attributes of perfection ; the only safe guide for weak and fallible mortals was experience.

Fox rose again, but he was unable to proceed for some moments, and the whole House was, by all accounts, moved as it has rarely been moved. He recalled the kindness which he had received, when little more than a boy, at Burke's hands, and referred to the ignominious terms in which Burke had spoken of him. ' I do not recollect having used any,' cried Burke. ' My right hon. friend ', replied Fox, ' does not recollect the epithets ; they are out of his mind ; then they are completely and for ever out of mine. I cannot cherish a recollection so painful, and from this moment they are obliterated and forgotten.' But it was to no effect, and the concluding speeches of the two men did nothing to change the situation. Pitt wound up in business-like fashion by remarking on the ' singular situation in which the House stood ' on the subject under discussion, viz. the Quebec Bill, but adding that he did not think Burke could be said to have been out of order. Members returned home

unconscious that, if any one day can be said to have been the birthday of English political democracy in the House of Commons, it was May 6, 1791. They were conscious indeed that they had witnessed a scene unprecedented in their experience, a scene which they remembered all their lives and told to their children after them. One member had a more particular experience to relate—which shows that what a contemporary calls ‘the fury of the god within him’ did not leave Burke with the rising of the House, as it could scarcely have done. Taking Burke home in his carriage, he was led to express some approval of the line taken by Fox. ‘You are one of those people—set me down,’ cried Burke, and was only with difficulty prevented from getting out into the rain.

A few days afterwards the debate was resumed. Burke, while speaking to the question this time, was inevitably urged to further personal explanation. He had not plotted to break up the Whigs, even though a newspaper had imputed that design to him, and he certainly had not meant to do Fox harm by leading him on to go further than he meant to go. Sentence of banishment had been pronounced against him by his own party. He was put upon his defence by a man whom he remembered as a boy, whom he had watched develop into the most brilliant and powerful debater that ever existed, and by whom he was now described as having abandoned every principle that had hitherto distinguished him. But he was not ashamed of having written the *Reflections*. As for the new French government, it was not a republic, it was an anomaly, and he knew not how to describe it save in the words of the poet:

A shape

If shape it might be called that shape had none
Distinguishable in member, joint or limb ;
Or substance might be called that shadow seemed,
For each seemed either ; black it stood as night,
Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell
And shook a dreadful dart ; what seemed his head
The likeness of a kingly crown had on

One would have thought that Burke would have been indisposed to undertake the consideration of any other subject immediately. Yet the very next day we find him speaking, quite calmly, on the subject of imprisonment for debt. His reforming propensities, save where he conceived the vital part of English society to be threatened, remained the same as ever.

Burke now stood alone. He made no definite approach to the Ministerialists, and his relations with the Whigs remained highly ambiguous. It was in vain for Fox to urge that, if he were separated from his old party, it was by his own choice, and that, if he should repent of that separation, he might be assured his friends would receive him, respect him, love him as heretofore. Burke was adamant. Higher interests were, he conceived, at stake than his own position or that of his party. The issue was now raised to a plane which forced men to range themselves on one side or the other. The French Revolution was a fact, and a fact pregnant with incalculable potentialities. Thus, by a satire of circumstance, the man who had been the consistent upholder of party government, one of whose chief contributions to English politics it had been to place the theory of party government on a reasoned basis, was now without a party himself, and, in the event, did much to break up the party with which he had been associated during a long political life. .

It was no light sacrifice that Burke had made. He could not now expect to gain such friends as he had lost, and, what weighed with him most of all, his son's prospects might be injuriously affected by his action. 'For one mortification,' he wrote to one of the French émigrés, 'that you have endured, we have endured twenty. My son has crossed land and sea with much trouble and at expense above his means. But the cause of humanity requires it, he does not murmur, and is ready to do as much and more for men whose faces he has not seen.' Fox was not the only one of his old friends whom Burke had now left behind him. Francis was in general sympathy with the French democratic programme, and he and Burke parted company. 'Has not,' asked Francis, in language worthy of Burke himself, 'has not God Himself commanded, or permitted, the storm to purify the elements?' The Duke of Portland and Sir Gilbert Elliot could not for some time forgive Burke for his precipitation of a party catastrophe; even Windham fell away temporarily. A little time after this, Burke received a tribute from Reynolds, then near his end. Reynolds published an engraving after one of his portraits of his old friend, and placed underneath some lines from the poet of whom, especially in his later years, Burke sometimes reminds us. But from whatever reason it may have been, Burke insisted on the erasure of the lines and endeavoured to recall such impressions containing them as had already been issued.¹

¹ The engraving, a stipple engraving I believe, was done by Benedetti and published August 1791. Copies without the lines are still to be met with, but those with the lines, though a few seem to have been in existence when Burke's early biographers wrote, must now be very scarce.

So spake the fervent angel, but his zeal
None seconded, as out of season judged,
Or singular and rash . . . unmoved,
Unshaken, unseduced, untterrified
His loyalty he kept, his love, his zeal,
Nor number, nor example moved him aught
To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind,
Though single From amidst them forth he passed
Long way through hostile scorn, which he sustained
Superior, nor of violence feared aught ,
And with retorted scorn his back he turned
On those proud towers to swift destruction doomed

CHAPTER XII

BURKE'S LATER POSITION—'APPEAL FROM THE NEW TO THE OLD WHIGS'

(1791-1792)

BURKE had, as we have seen, made several attempts to explain in Parliament his present position. But the subject being large, and the House of Commons being mortal, he had not been able to do so to his satisfaction. On the occasion of his chief opportunity, it was evidently the human aspect of the rupture between Fox and himself that had really moved the House, nor had he any reason to suppose that the sympathies of most of the onlookers had been on his side. Although it was he who had left his party, none the less he felt that he had been wounded in the house of his friends by the hand of the chief among them. 'The thing that I feared has come upon me.' He was charged with having given the lie to the strenuous efforts and outspoken convictions of a lifetime. His reputation for sanity of judgement was also impeached. Much had indeed happened in France by the middle of 1791; but that was nothing in comparison with the 'varieties of untried being' through which the Revolution was still to pass. The King was still nominally on the

throne ; the war with Austria and Prussia had not begun ; the September massacres had not taken place ; the Assembly had not yielded place to the Convention ; Burke was thought by many to be a visionary, an alarmist, a Solomon Eagle prophesying woes that might never come to pass.

As regards the charge of inconsistency, this is not one which now affects any estimate of Burke. But it was a very living question at the time. It occupied Burke himself ; it exercised the invective of his contemporaries ; it was debated by a succeeding generation of public men for as long at least as he continued to be anything of a living memory. Formal consistency is not indeed to be looked for in a series of writings such as Burke's ; there was little indeed in common between the occasions which evoked respectively *Thoughts on the Present Discontents* and *Reflections on the French Revolution*. Nor is there anything intrinsically astonishing in a change from what was, on the standards of that time, a moderate Liberalism to a moderate ¹ Conservatism—a change engendered, to put it crudely, by the fear of a mob replacing the fear of a king, and defended on the broad principle of trimming the ship. However, in a man of Burke's magnitude, comparatively few degrees at the centre may make a tolerably large difference at the circumference, and the matter calls for some consideration. One set of conceptions, indeed, in the light of which he himself envisaged the question, is not now of much importance ; from the practical point of view he defended the consistency of his present and his past in

¹ As already remarked, Burke continued to be a reformer in matters of detail, and also as regards Ireland.

the light of what the Whigs regarded as their political Bible, viz. the legislation which regulated the Protestant succession. With the details of this we need not concern ourselves here, but some other questions remain.

Burke was not, strictly speaking, a systematic political thinker. He never subjected, nor would he have wished to subject, traditional Whig doctrines to any independent or searching criticism; he takes them over, broadly speaking, as the formal framework for his own thought. His general attitude towards problems of political philosophy was dominated by his ever-present sense of the slow process by which political order has actually been achieved, and by a corresponding reluctance to 'dig round the city walls' himself, or to encourage others to do so. He adopts, again, certain conceptions current in his own day which he transcends without formally abandoning. As regards fundamentals, he speaks from first to last of society as being an 'artificial' thing, the product of deliberate contrivance. The 'social state', the relation between rulers and ruled, was the result of a 'contract' by which men had agreed to put an end to a 'state of nature'. Man, as such, has certain 'natural rights', some of which he has preserved, and others of which he has given up on entry into the 'social state'. But whatever these rights may be, man, as such, has no natural right to political power; ¹ the degree of political power to be assigned to any

¹ See, *e.g.*, especially *French Revolution, Works*, II. 332-333, and the beginning of his speech on the *East India Bill, Works*, II. 176-77. I am particularly indebted here to Mr Elton's *Survey of English Literature* (1780-1830), vol. 1 pp. 241, 242, and the references which Mr Elton has collected to illustrate Burke's attitude to 'Natural Rights'.

class of men when once they are in 'civil society' is a matter to be settled by 'convention', that is, by law. With the American justification of resistance on the ground of 'natural rights', with the assertion, in the Declaration of Independence, as to 'Laws of Nature' justifying the dissolution of 'political bands' he never expressly dealt, and he might have found it awkward. But his statement with reference to America contained in the *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol* (1777), 'that a free government is for practical purposes what the people think so', sounds strange in view of the general tone of his later utterances.

Side by side with the above conception of the genesis of 'civil' society, and imperfectly fused with it, we find, especially in Burke's later writings, a different order of ideas. In the *Reflections* society is, as we have seen, the product of human instincts normally working. He spiritualises the cruder conception of the 'social contract' out of recognition by regarding it as a partnership in all the higher activities of man, a partnership in which past, present, and future generations share. He emphasises the 'natural' character of the State, artificial it may be, but in words reminiscent of Greek philosophy, 'art is man's nature'. The State is a unique thing; mechanical and even biological analogies are insufficient to explain it; it is a 'moral essence'.¹ Here we see what is generally called Burke's mysticism. The instinct which leads men to combine into political association is a fact, but it is none the less a mysterious fact. An element of

¹ See the beginning of the *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, where Burke says at the same time that the state is 'the arbitrary production of the human mind' (*Works*, v 153).

mystery attaches also to the result of this combination. The State has a life other than that of the individuals composing it ; it preserves its identity through long ages ; it is perpetually the same, yet not the same ; it grows, it decays, it renovates itself. In the words of Burke's best commentator :¹ ' As mere life itself is an insoluble mystery, so is the life of that invisible entity which is understood when we use any terms expressive of the mass of society. . . . Neither man nor the state can escape from the character of original mystery impressed upon them by the life and the nature in and by which they are generated '

Up to 1790 Burke had not had much occasion to grapple with fundamental problems of political obligation, but the French Revolution compelled him to consider more closely questions relating especially to the nature of sovereignty and to the rights of majorities in a community. On these matters he steadily refuses to draw any arguments from the origin of society itself. Historically States may, and often have, originated in mere force, in conquest ; but, as he says in a very significant phrase, ' time mellows into legality what was violent in its commencement '. The origin of social union is one thing, and a mysterious thing, but, so he seems to argue, the disposition of political power within the State is another and a practical thing. This Burke regards as having nothing to do with the ' natural rights ' of man, but as a matter to be settled by convenience and embodied in law. Some permanent and paramount source of authority

¹ Payne, Introduction to *French Revolution*, p. 37. Lord Morley treats this aspect of Burke's thought less sympathetically (*Burke*, pp. 165-66).

is, however, necessary in any State, and Burke, as we saw earlier, grounds this authority in 'prescription'. It was with monarchical authority that the circumstances of the time led him to be especially preoccupied, and after 1790 he becomes extremely concerned to put the ark of the British covenant beyond the reach of the Philistines. This desire, combined with Whig doctrine, leads him, in his arguments with Dr. Price, to a strange insistence on the exact terms of the Bill of Rights and the Act of Settlement as of verbally inspired documents, finally and once for all regulating the terms of the 'contract' between sovereign and people. Reverting now to the question of Burke's consistency, we find, and not unnaturally, that the emphasis is on the side of the ruled before 1790, and on that of the rulers afterwards. In 1770, in *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, we find him asserting that King, Lords and Commons are all 'representatives of the people', and that the whole scheme of government 'originates from the people'. In 1777 the Revolution settlement is said to have been the 'free choice of the people without either King or Parliament'¹ In 1790 we find him rebuking Dr. Price for holding a view not logically distinguishable from this, however crudely Dr. Price may have expressed it. In 1791, in the work which we are about to examine, to say that the sovereignty originates *from* the people is a meaningless proposition; it is emphatically denied that sovereignty

¹ *Works*, v. 473, cf also *Speeches*, ii. 119, 121, on Economical Reform, and with primary reference to the Civil List (1780), 'everything his Majesty enjoyed was a delegated right, and consequently subject to examination, correction, and control'. Subsequently Burke says that denial of this is not Toryism but Jacobitism.

resides *in* the people, and the 'original contract' is said to 'bind posterity', except in cases of extreme necessity. Lord Morley has put the whole matter in a nutshell, and most felicitously Burke 'changed his front, but never his ground'.

Coleridge, indeed, appears to deny that Burke ever had any ground to change. His remarks—in the *Friend*—on this head, like some other of the sage's oracles, do not seem to issue in any very positive conclusion, however, when Coleridge criticises anyone, there is nothing to do but to give what he says. He agrees that Burke's career was marked by a broad uniformity, that he cannot be said to have supported different principles at different times of his life, and that he was consistent from first to last in his opposition to the application of abstract principles to politics. He points out that Burke as a statesman 'found himself, as it were, in a Noah's ark, with a very few men and a great many beasts', and that, in allusion to Goldsmith's lines, he was compelled by practical necessities to compromise all the time. It does not, we may remark in passing, appear that Burke himself felt that he had been forced into compromise by actual exigencies to a greater degree than any one else is forced to compromise in a somewhat imperfect world; however, the pith of Coleridge's criticism may be given in his own words.

The inconsistency [he says] to which I allude is of a different kind. it is the want of congruity in the principles appealed to in different parts of the same work, *i.e.* is an apparent versatility of principles with the occasion. If his opponents are theorists, then everything is to be founded on prudence, on mere calculations of expediency; and every man is represented as acting according to the state

of his own immediate self-interest. Are his opponents calculators? Then calculation itself is represented as a sort of crime. God has given us feelings, and we are to obey them; and the most absurd prejudices become venerable, to which these feelings have given consecration.

But Burke would have cheerfully admitted that, unless his consistent hatred of *a priori* theorising in this sphere may be called a principle, the only absolute, not to say abstract, principles which he recognised as applicable to politics were certain elementary principles of morality. The answer seems valid. He would not have been perturbed by what, after all, appears to be the gist of Coleridge's criticism, viz. that his philosophy neglected neither the rational nor the instinctive sides of human nature. Nor was his prudence ever of what he himself calls the 'false and reptile' variety; he never, in fact, appeals to *mere* expediency. The expediency which he invokes against the intolerance of theory is an expediency of the highest kind. It is an expediency based on a view of human nature which, if not exaggerated, is anything but ignoble, an expediency which, though chary of appealing to higher than ordinary motives for the purposes of ordinary affairs, is warmed by a desire that the relations between man and man, class and class, nation and nation, should be governed by justice tempered with generosity. 'I do not inquire whether you have a right to make your people miserable, but whether you have not an interest in making them happy.'

Burke's ground was, in truth, civilised society itself, no less. The organised and civilised society of

his own country was to him not a notion but a thing, a complex and multiform fact, vividly apprehended as a whole, intimately conceived in all its component parts. The nation, the state, were terms which called up before his mind's eye a varied and moving panorama of living human beings, all held together in their diversified situations, their varied aims, their competing interests, by the framework of government. The daily round of farm, counting-house, workshop, parsonage, regiment, law court, college ; the economy of the East India Company and of the country shop ; the respective tasks of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the exciseman ; the revenues of the kingdom in all their details and those of the next farmer in Beaconsfield ; the debates of the High Court of Parliament and of the village ale-house ; the probable thoughts of the Duke of Portland and of his own coachman—all these were not merely known, but were present and sympathetic realities to a mind which worked upon a considerable field of observation and an enormous field of knowledge, to a spirit which thanked God ' for the diversity of His creatures '. Nor, as must be added, was Burke ever tempted to exaggerate the influence of politics upon the workaday life of the world, or, in his own words, to ' think more of the wisdom and power of human legislation than in truth it deserves '. On this subject he always retained much of Johnson's wise scepticism. In spite of the dominion which political questions exercised over his own mind, his vision was too wide to allow him to regard human motive and conduct as indefinitely amenable to governmental regulation, or to claim for the field of action to which he had dedicated the whole of his life

an unduly large capacity for promoting human happiness.¹

Standing, as he now did, between two parties, and uncertain of his reception in Parliament, Burke appealed to the nation. In the *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (July 1791) he urges that he had said nothing in the *Reflections* which was inconsistent with his own former self, with traditional Whig doctrine, or with a reasonable measure of concern for the future. Conscious that he had 'gone all out' in the previous work, and not invariably to the best advantage, he tries hard to hold himself in on this occasion, and succeeds until near the end, when he lets himself go in fine style. In the first of the two very different parts into which the *Appeal* is sharply divided, Burke, speaking in the third person, discusses what he had said in the light of what he always regarded as an orthodox exposition of Whig constitutional doctrine, of the arguments for the prosecution in the impeachment of Sacheverell, under Queen Anne, for a high Tory sermon on non-resistance. The details of these arguments he discusses with the same rabbinical zeal that we have already seen him devoting to the letter of the legislation regulating the Protestant succession, but the value of the *Appeal* does not lie in the historical facts and contemporary theories by which Burke was or conceived himself to have been bound to the Whig

¹ I cannot agree with Lord Morley (*Burke*, p. 3) that Burke is 'everywhere conscious of the mastery of laws, institutions and government over the character and happiness of men' if these words be taken at their face value. It is difficult to cite specific passages in support of an opinion which must depend upon the conception that we form of the man and his work as a whole, but Lord Morley's view does not seem reconcilable with Burke's general attitude towards the French Revolution.

party. It is the latter part which matters, where he moves in a larger order of political ideas ; one section,¹ especially, is remarkable for the manner in which it focusses the dissipated philosophical lights which illumine the *Reflections*.

Having earlier informed us that 'nothing universal can be rationally affirmed on any moral or political subject', Burke finds himself for once compelled to evoke certain 'metaphysical phantoms' from 'darkness and the sleep of ages'. What is the nature of the duty that we owe to the State? What do we mean when we talk of 'the people', and ought a majority of the people told by the head to be able to do anything?

The nature, he observes, of the duty which we owe to society is not subject by any means entirely to our own wills ; we were born into society without our consent having been previously asked ; nor, for example, do parents and children expressly consent to the moral obligations arising from their mutual relation. The sanction of these moral obligations lies in God, who willed the State, and willed that we should find the completeness of our nature in it. The place of every man determines his duty ; nor is this principle rendered inoperative by the consideration that duties sometimes conflict. Nor are we left without powerful instincts to make our duty to our country 'as dear and grateful as it is awful and coercive'. What, then, is our country? Burke criticises by implication subsequent schools of thought which have held that nationality consists mainly in language, or in race, or in religion, or in geographical situation. A hundred years later, Renan, in a famous essay, found nationality

¹ *Works*, III. 76 to about 93

to reside not necessarily in any of these things ; but in moral affinity expressed by a desire for a common life, and based on community of memories and of hopes, on '*la volonté de continuer à faire valoir l'héritage qu'on a reçu indivis*' Our country, says Burke also, is not a thing of mere physical locality. It consists, in a great measure, in the ancient order into which we are born. We may have the same geographical situation, but another country, as we may have the same country on another soil.

Is, again, a majority told by the head omnipotent ? Revolutionary France had held it to be so. But, Burke says in effect, it was herein that the anarchical character of the Revolution¹ was manifest, viz in breaking up society into its original units and collecting these ' loose and vague individuals ' into mobs. It is in a sense open to men to proceed in this way, but if they choose to begin all over again ' they little know how many a weary step is to be taken before they can form themselves into a mass which has a true politic personality '. In a very significant passage Burke reminds us that, if we were not used to it, we should find the phenomenon of majority rule sufficiently surprising. There is nothing self-evident about it, nothing in it obviously congenial to uncivilised and unreflecting mankind. A mode of procedure by which a subject is voted upon, and a minority gives way in

¹ Cf. the definition of Jacobinism in *Works*, iii 216, where it is said to consist ' in taking the people as equal individuals, without any corporate name or description, without attention to property, without division of powers, and forming the government from the delegates from a number of men so constituted bribing the public creditors or the poor with the spoils, now of one part of the community, now of another, without regard to prescription or possession ', etc.

an orderly manner to the will of a majority, is not only the result of a process of historical development, but presupposes also the existence of that very social order which alone gives the terms majority and minority any real meaning.

The mind is brought far more easily to acquiesce in the proceedings of one man, or a few, who act under a general procuration for the state, than in the vote of a victorious majority in councils, in which every man has his share in the deliberation. For there the beaten party are exasperated and soured by the previous contention, and mortified by the conclusive defeat. This mode of decision, where wills may be so nearly equal, when, according to circumstances, the smaller number may be the stronger force, and where apparent reason may be all on one side, and on the other little else than impetuous appetite; all this must be the result of a very particular and special convention, confirmed afterwards by long habits of obedience, by a sort of discipline in society, and by a strong hand, vested with stationary, permanent power, to enforce this sort of constructive general will. What organ it is that shall declare the corporate mind is so much a matter of positive arrangement, that several states, for the validity of several of their acts, have required a proportion of voices much greater than that of a mere majority. . . . The laws in many countries to *condemn* require more than a mere majority; less than an equal number to *acquit*. In our judicial trials we require unanimity either to condemn or absolve. In some incorporations, one man speaks for the whole; in others, a few. Until the other day, in the constitution of Poland, unanimity was required to give validity to any act of their great national council or diet. This approaches much more nearly to rude nature than the institutions of any other country. Such, indeed, every commonwealth must be, without a positive law to recognise in a certain number the will of the active body.¹

There was nothing, in fact, in the constitution of

¹ *Works*, iii. 83.

England or of France which implied that a majority told by the head constituted the nation, or was empowered to act in the name of the nation. The controlling element in society does not reside in the multitude ; but it exists, and must needs exist. Burke places it in a ' natural aristocracy ' consisting of men distinguished by an honourable use of the advantages given by birth and leisure, and by actual achievement in every walk of professional and commercial life. Without such ' there is no nation '.

Nor, on the practical question, did Burke think his apprehensions unwarranted ; it is, he says elsewhere, of the very character of a statesman to be apprehensive of possible dangers. The party leaders might not go the lengths of the leaders of the seditious clubs, but party leaders are not altogether free agents ; ' the world is governed by go-betweens '. Moreover, as Burke now sees for the first time, the theory of the Revolution was assuming the complexion of a religious dogma, and becoming endowed with all the possibilities of a religious dogma ' There is a boundary to men's passions when they act from feeling ; none when they are under the influence of imagination.'

For the rest of his life Burke is a man inspired, possessed by hatred of the Revolution and by pity for its victims. Some of the manifestations of this hatred and pity may strike us as unbecoming and overstrained ; but an abnormal capacity for feeling was an essential part of his genius. This fanaticism, if the word can fitly be applied to a zeal which rested on such a coherent basis of thought, was not until the very end to become of the kind which excludes every other subject of interest ; Burke's mind was too

capacious, his sympathies too wide, for any such complete absorption. India he still regarded as the task which lay nearest to his hand; that task was by no means over, and there was also Ireland. As regards Europe, his intellect could, at any rate up to this time, appraise the situation coolly enough. But to his imagination the spirit of a nation seemed to have become embodied in daemonic form; some supernatural power seemed to be brooding over the European scene and to be impelling human motives and actions towards incalculable issues. Yet at times he hesitated. He believed that it was a Divine agency which had guided mankind in their slow progress from barbarism to civilisation. Might it after all be that that agency was at work even now, and that it was preparing some catastrophic change, in a manner more mysterious than any of which history had told him? Thoughts of this kind seem to have visited him when concluding a very business-like review of European affairs, undertaken at the end of 1791.

The evil is stated, in my opinion, as it exists. The remedy must be where power, wisdom and information, I hope, are more united with good intentions than they can be with me. I have done with this subject, I believe for ever. It has given me many anxious moments for the two last years. If a great change is to be made in human affairs, the minds of men will be fitted to it, the general opinions and feelings will draw that way. Every fear, every hope, will forward it; and then they, who persist in opposing the mighty current in human affairs, will appear rather to resist the decrees of Providence itself, than the mere designs of men. They will not be resolute and firm but perverse and obstinate.¹

¹ *Thoughts on French affairs, Works*, III. 392.

CHAPTER XIII

LATER LIFE IN LONDON AND BEACONSFIELD—BURKE AND IRELAND

WHAT, meanwhile, was happening at Beaconsfield all this time? Even though European civilisation was threatened by a raging pestilence from France, even though England, having lost her possessions in the West, seemed to have shown herself unworthy of her possessions in the East, Burke was not always inveighing against Dr. Price and the seditious clubs, or against the prisoner at the bar in Westminster Hall. As soon as the parliamentary session was over he escaped to his country house, where he continued to receive visitors with the national hospitality. Those of his London friends who came to Gregories never knew whom they might find there: French émigrés overwhelmed by the misfortunes of their country and extremely vocal on the subject; stray foreigners; chance arrivals from Ireland; even, on one occasion, two Brahmins, to whom Burke allotted a greenhouse for the preparation of their food and the performance of their rites, watching them the while with intense interest. Their generous host had, since the *Reflections*, a European reputation. Having never held any political office worth mentioning, and having identified himself with a succession of apparently lost

causes, yet his position was unique—a vital power over public opinion, but without any of the externals of power. The Burke of these days was no longer indeed the man of fifteen years back, when his evident enjoyment of life had moved the envy of Boswell. Visitors found a man rather careworn, bearing some obvious signs of disappointment upon him, liable to fits of nervous irritability and low spirits, yet by no means habitually morose, and frequently genial enough. Burke had indeed, as we have seen, enough to trouble him in his later life apart from politics. His son, on whom all his hopes were centred, had not so far done anything in particular in the world. His financial embarrassments were becoming now more acute than ever; the question of how he managed to keep up his country house now that supplies from Rockingham had ceased can only be explained on the hypothesis of exceedingly trusting creditors.

Over a somewhat ill-assorted and apparently a rather casual Irish household Burke presided in a manner that was, from all accounts, of the kindest. One of the first things that struck visitors was the contrast between Burke himself and his family. These last were all perfect in the eyes of the master of the house, but except for Mrs. Burke, whom everyone liked, they were not generally regarded in that light by the outside world. Richard Burke, the son, had plenty of ability, as his letters to his father show. But he had evidently formed himself after the exceedingly dangerous model that Nature had provided for his imitation, and, having accordingly developed into a monumental prig, was not generally much thought of. However, he was sound in essentials, and a good son

to his father ; on these points there is no doubt. There was also Mr. Richard Burke, senior, who had not done very well at the bar, and was glad to make his home at Beaconsfield. Neither his high and even tiresome animal spirits nor his brogue had been subdued by age, and since his facetiousness did not respect persons, he was not universally popular. We are told that he occasionally enlivened the family circle by reading aloud Burke's speeches as reported in the newspapers and introducing sly alterations of his own, thus causing exquisite agony to his brother, until the hoax was discovered. There was also a niece, Miss Mary French, who had been imported from Ireland, and was described by a candid person as the ' most perfect she-Paddy that ever was caught '. Mr. William Burke, who doubtless had, as his affectionate relative was convinced, excellent principles, but was nevertheless liable to fail in applying them, was before long to return from India, and to return empty. The presumption in his favour that this fact would create does not seem to be justified by further inquiry. He also found shelter at Beaconsfield. ' Burke has now ', wrote Sir Gilbert Elliot, after meeting them all at dinner in 1793, ' such a train after him as would sink anyone but himself.'

Burke continued, up to the last three years of his life, to move freely in London society. Of his old friends of the Club, Garrick and Goldsmith had been long dead, and Johnson had died more recently ; but the Club continued, and there were also various Whig houses in which he was a welcome guest. Chief among them was that of Mrs. Crewe, an old friend and correspondent of Burke's, one of those great Whig ladies ' whose lips, more persuasive than those of Fox himself,

had carried the Westminster election against Palace and 'Treasury', and whose health, on one occasion during that memorable contest, had been drunk even to excess by the Prince of Wales to the toast of 'True Blue and Mrs. Crewe'. An observer of genius met some of 'the train' at Mrs. Crewe's in May 1792. The hostess, 'in a blaze of beauty' which 'uglified everything near her,' received Mrs. Burke 'soft, reasonable, and obliging'; Miss French, 'a wild Irish girl' with 'a prodigious brogue'; Mr. Richard Burke, 'comic, humorous, bold, and queer', and young Mr. Burke. Later came Burke himself, 'easy, cordial, wonderful'; but, if politics were mentioned even on his own side, showing so extreme an irritability that his countenance assumed the expression 'of a man going to defend himself against murderers'—but we must make allowance for Miss Burney's 'sensibility'.—'Charles Fox being mentioned, Mrs. Crewe told us that he had lately said, upon being shown some passage in Mr. Burke's book which he had warmly opposed, but which, in the event, had made its own justification, very candidly, "Well! Burke is right—but Burke is often right, only he is right too soon". "Had Fox seen some things in that book as soon," answered Burke, "he would at this moment in all probability be the first Minister of the country." "What!" cried Mrs. Crewe, "with Pitt? No, no. Pitt won't go out and Charles Fox will never make a coalition with Pitt." "And why not?" said Mr. Burke drily. "Why not this coalition as well as other coalitions?" Nobody tried to answer this. "Charles Fox, however," said Mr. Burke afterwards, "can never internally like the French Revolution." He is entangled, but in himself, if he should have no other objection to it,

he has at least too much taste for such a revolution.' Mr. Richard Burke subsequently related 'very comically' various censures cast upon his brother, as being the friend of despots and the abettor of slavery. 'Mr. Burke looked half-alarmed at his brother's opening, but when he had finished he very good-humouredly poured out a glass of wine, and turning to Miss Burney said, "Come, then—here's slavery for ever". "This would do for you completely, Mr. Burke," said Mrs. Crewe, "if it could get into a newspaper. . . . I should like to draw up the paragraph!" "And add," said Mr. Burke, "the toast was addressed to Miss Burney in order to pay court to the Queen."' "

Burke's conversational powers continued unabated. Discursiveness, to which he had always been liable, appears to have grown upon him ; he did not always pay much attention to his interlocutor ; and Sheridan's sallies in this connection were not always restrained in the presence of the great man himself. People with business, we are told, sometimes found his 'eloquent rambles' trying. Of such was Francis,¹ who, visiting Burke one day by appointment on Indian business, found him in his garden, and could only with the greatest difficulty withdraw him from contemplation of a grasshopper. 'What a beautiful animal is this,' said Burke. 'Observe its structure, its legs, its wings, its eyes—yet Socrates,' he continued, in disregard of remonstrances, 'according to the exhibition of him in Aristophanes, attended to a much less animal ; he actually measured the proportion which its size bore to the space it passed over in its skip. I think the skip of a grasshopper does not exceed its length ; let us see,' and so on. On

¹ Butler's *Reminiscences*, II. 103.

important occasions of domestic life, it appears, Burke could reinforce the formality of the age with his full parliamentary manner. On the occasion of the marriage of Miss Palmer, Sir Joshua Reynolds' niece and Burke's ward, he frightened the bride out of her wits by what we are told was 'an impressive speech, applicable to her intended change of condition', and 'the soothing powers which he exerted endearingly and perseveringly' were quite unsuccessful in composing her. Nor, as may be imagined, did the advent of the French Revolution detract from the energies of his conversation, and it became, as we have seen, unsafe to differ from him on that topic. Visitors to Beaconsfield would find him surrounded by a circle of admiring exiles, holding forth to them in French of which the fluency at least was not hindered by a strong Irish accent, sympathising with their desire for revenge, but holding out no encouragement to their delusive hopes. 'Mais enfin, Monsieur, quand est-ce que nous retournerons dans la France?' 'Jamais' was the answer.

For all his occasional explosions, Burke did not impress people as in any way eccentric in private life, or even, so far as we can tell, as presenting any very markedly individual traits of character. Knowing so much, and being interested in everything, he could, like Johnson, talk about anything to anyone. Apart from his talk, he seemed, when about the place at Beaconsfield, a model country gentleman, an upholder of all the proprieties of his position, keenly interested in weather and crops, a pillar of the church and of all local good works. There used to be shown in Beaconsfield Vicarage a mark that had been worn on the wall by repeated applications of Burke's elbow, as

he leaned up against the mantelpiece talking to the Vicar, with whom he often spent the interval between services on a Sunday. With some of his neighbours he lived on terms of close intimacy, and his niece married into a local family. Visitors to the neighbourhood in the middle or early middle years of the nineteenth century were told the usual things by old inhabitants ; that Mr. Burke was a nice kind gentleman and very good to the poor ; that he drove four black horses ; that he used to amuse himself in strolling over his lawn and grounds with a spade in his hand, digging up the plantain roots in the pastures. Crabbe, who lived for some little time at Beaconsfield and, since he owed everything to Burke, had good reason to remember him, was much questioned in later life, but had nothing particular to tell. Burke made probably no more vivid impression on most of his neighbours than he made on Crabbe.

Simple and regular in his way of living, Burke had no peculiar views on the commonplaces of ordinary life, on social relationships, on marriage, or the bringing-up of children. He acquiesced, with the acquiescence of knowledge and sympathy, in the limitations of average human nature, and in the ruling conventions of his time. Nor, conscious as he undoubtedly was of his own powers, is there any suggestion of the 'unco guid' about him, or of any unpleasant attitude of mental superiority. 'Everyone with him', said Francis, 'was either God or devil'; and it is certainly true that Burke was great in his hates as well as his loves, and that the circumstances of his later life considerably enlarged his circle of the former. But, politics apart, this most certainly

does not seem to have been his habit of regarding people in the ordinary way, at least during the greater part of his life. There is nothing in such records as we have of his conversation or in his correspondence which shows any predominant bitterness of spirit in private relationships; his irritability was not of the malevolent kind. He was too warm-blooded, too virile, to indulge in spiteful and carping criticism; he had essentially what Bagehot calls the 'enjoying Tory nature' and appreciated the good things of life. 'I am not well, Mr. Speaker,' he said one day. 'I eat too much, I drink too much, and I sleep too little.' Temperate enough himself at any rate on contemporary standards, he had no desire to force an undue thrift or abstinence on those less fortunately circumstanced. 'He will only spend it on gin,' said Miss French to her uncle when he gave sixpence to a beggar. 'Well, my dear, if gin be of any comfort to him, let him have gin,' was the reply. On this question, indeed, his latitudinarian views gave some scandal. Gin, he thought,¹ helped the digestion of meagre food; wine the poor could not touch; beer would not 'do the business' at any rate among 'seamen and fishermen'. 'Under the pressure of the cares and sorrows of our mortal condition men have at all times and in all countries called in some physical aid to their moral consolations—wine, beer, opium, brandy, or tobacco.' As to education, he told the unwilling French headmaster of the school which he set up at Penn for the sons of the émigrés, that if the boys did not behave themselves they must be flogged, and flogged soundly. It was the English fashion, and worked wonders.

¹ *Thoughts on Scarcity* (1795), *Works*, v. 106.

The manner in which Burke repaid to its unhappy survivors the hospitality which he and his son had enjoyed under the *ancien régime* was magnificent, their sufferings inflaming his compassion even to excess. His house became a hotel for successive relays of ladies, gentlemen, and priests—some of them difficult enough. Madame de Genlis was long remembered by the polite world for her airs, and by the local carpenter for the exertions that she imposed on him by insisting on every ray of light being excluded from her bedroom. Everything that could be done for them Burke did. We find him now examining the possibilities of 'the Antelope Inn, Wycombe', as a hostel for priests, now occupied with the details of the school above mentioned, which was to be his chief local interest in his last years. He found, as others have since found, that to be an exceedingly active member of committees for the relief of refugees from the Continent was not a bed of roses. To his difficulties, especially with the Spartan spirits who thought that the refugees were living in the lap of luxury, and that the accommodation of a private soldier was good enough for any of them, his correspondence bears eloquent witness. But this was the smallest side of Burke's growing absorption in the affairs of France, as evinced by letters, public and private, and by papers of various kinds. As Dr. Holland Rose justly remarks, it was fortunate that some of these documents did not go beyond his study walls, and it was a hard task for Pitt to separate the wise from the unwise in his voluminous outpourings.

Fox might well have acknowledged, as Miss Burney relates that he did, Burke's extraordinary prescience

in European affairs, whatever may be thought of some of his practical proposals for dealing with them. The French Revolution, he thus early maintained, differed from all other revolutions in being a revolution of 'doctrine and theoretic dogma'. Its nearest analogue lay in the Protestant Reformation. It could not be local in its effects,¹ but would prove a cause of division in other countries. No counter-revolution was to be expected from internal causes only; the longer the system lasted the stronger both internally and externally would it become; it would be to the interest of the Revolutionary leaders to intervene in the affairs of other nations; foreign intervention would accordingly be necessary. Nor, from about the middle of 1791, had he confined himself to verbal combat with the Revolution. Monarchs had hailed him as the champion of prescriptive government, and he was by no means insensitive to compliments of that nature and from that quarter. An emissary from the French exiles in Germany now invited his assistance in their plans for restoring the French monarchy. He accordingly decided to despatch his son on a vague mission to see how the land lay among the Royalists at Coblenz.

Pitt and Dundas, very naturally, did not altogether approve of this adventure in amateur diplomacy; but Burke was now too important for his wishes to be altogether disregarded. If Richard Burke could find out anything and let them know, well and good, but, officially, they washed their hands of the whole affair. Richard Burke set out, and on his way, was shocked to meet the old Bishop of Auxerre, with whom he had

¹ *Thoughts on French Affairs* (1792), *Works*, III 350.

stayed years before, now in poverty and exile. He arrived in due course at Coblenz. The Royalists received him with the respect due to his father's son, and were polite enough to conceal their surprise at some of his proposals. Burke had cherished the fallacious hope that the exiles would accede to the idea of a more or less liberal programme. But that was the last thing which they desired; they had suffered much, and were thirsting for revenge. The rulers of the petty principalities on the Rhine, who dreaded the effect of the Revolution on their own misgoverned dominions, identified themselves with the exiles' cause. Their hopes were about to be still further raised by the vague threats of armed intervention published by the European sovereigns assembled at Pilnitz (August 27, 1791). But it was impossible to do anything, and Burke had much better not have attempted to do anything, with the ineptitude and the mutual jealousies that prevailed at the phantom court on the Rhine. Richard Burke had despatched one or two reports to Dundas which were put into the waste-paper basket, and, on leaving Coblenz, he was furnished with a sort of provisional authority to treat with English ministers on the Royalists' behalf. But Pitt had not the least intention of going to war with France.

Neither France nor India was sufficient to exhaust Burke's energies; there remained his native country. Owing largely to the grant of increased facilities for her trade, Ireland was now enjoying a commercial prosperity to which the fine Georgian houses in her larger towns still bear their mute witness. Pitt had, in 1785, endeavoured to secure complete freedom of trade between England and Ireland, but the scheme

broke down owing to a complication of circumstances and to the opposition of the Whigs, in which Burke himself shared. Politically, matters were less satisfactory. The concession of legislative independence to the Irish Parliament had settled very little, and had established relations between the two countries which were highly anomalous. The Irish Parliament had no executive dependent on itself; the Lord-Lieutenant and his Chief Secretary were appointed from England, and an Irish ministry was practically dependent on the British Cabinet. The majority of the seats in Parliament were still in the control of Dublin Castle, the Catholics remained unenfranchised, nor was even the Protestant part of the population adequately represented. 'I think', wrote Burke in 1795, 'I can hardly overrate the malignity of the principles of Protestant ascendancy as they affect Ireland, or of Indianism as they affect these countries and as they affect Asia, or of Jacobinism as they affect all Europe and the state of human society itself.' These words sum up Burke's views on Ireland. Against the conception that Ireland must be governed by means of a ruling junta of Protestant 'undertakers' at Dublin Castle he never ceased to protest.

These views were free from the prejudices which were clouding his outlook on France. Having himself Catholic relations, he had nothing of religious bigotry. Moving on a larger stage than any which his native country could afford, he was able to see things there with considerable detachment. The tracts and letters which he composed on Irish affairs¹ at various

¹ These were collected and arranged in 1881 by Matthew Arnold (Macmillan), who supplied them with a too brief intro-

times, and especially towards the end of his life, are accordingly, on later comparisons, refreshingly unaffected by ferocity on the one hand or sentimentality on the other. But though they contain their due share of the reflective energy, the pregnant aphorisms common to all that Burke ever wrote, they are not among his most valuable productions, and are more than usually involved with situations from which most of the interest has departed. Nor have they the interest of presenting a complete view of all the aspects of the contemporary Irish question. Burke has little to say on various important matters raised by the settlement of 1782, or on the agrarian question which was to provide so much hardship and motive for sedition.

It was in the Catholic question, political and religious, that Burke saw the heart of the problem. Even in the height of his anti-revolutionary efforts in other fields he remained a radical reformer here. He hoped against hope, and for as long as a sane man could hope, for an Ireland united on the basis of a great reconciliation. The absurdity of a system by which four-fifths of the inhabitants of Ireland were absolutely destitute of political rights revolted his intellect; it revolted his moral sense that this proscription should be in effect a religious persecution without the motive of dogmatic zeal which alone could make religious persecution respectable. Burke firmly believed that the political danger which had sprung from the Papacy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and had supplied the motive for the political proscription which he was combating, was a thing of the

duction. The most important of those solely concerned with Irish affairs is the *First Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe, M.P.* (1792).

past. Considering the very unaggressive tendency of the Papacy during the eighteenth century there was much to be said for this view. But he went further. No more striking testimony could be found to what Lecky calls the low theological temperature of that age than the fact that Burke thought it probable that the Catholic Irish might be induced to abandon their religion in some numbers. But he was ready with his warning on this head. If they were induced to abandon their Church, it would not be to the Established Church that they would go, but to a far more protestant and democratic system.

As regards England, Burke had no feelings about the wrongs of Ireland at her hands since the concession of legislative independence and the removal of the trade restrictions. It was not the English government that was keeping the Catholics out of the franchise, or, when that had been gained, from a fuller measure of emancipation; all the English governments that he had ever known had only one wish about Ireland, viz. to leave her alone. 'What grievance,' he asked in 1795, 'has Ireland as Ireland to complain of with regard to Great Britain?' Her staple manufacture is encouraged; the subject is as free in Ireland as in England.' The real difficulty lay with the official jobbers and the great landowners who controlled the Irish Parliament, and that was, for far the greater part of it, an Irish interest. As regards the parties themselves, 'the Protestants of Ireland', he wrote in 1792, 'are just like the Catholics; the cat looking in at the window and the cat looking out of the window';¹ the only difference lay in the relative positions of the two animals.

¹ *Corr.* iii. 435.

While he himself did not fear the disturbing influence of the Papacy on Irish politics, yet he wrote in his reflective vein :

I confess that on occasions of this nature I am most afraid of the weakest reasonings because they discover the strongest passions . . . I know that such ideas as no man will distinctly produce to another or hardly venture to bring in any plain shape to his own mind, he will utter in obscure, ill-explained doubts, jealousies, surmises, fears and apprehensions ; and that, in such a fog, they will appear to have a good deal of size, and will make an impression, when, if they were clearly brought forth and defined, they would meet with nothing but scorn and derision.

Shortly after Richard Burke's return from Coblenz the Irish Catholics invited his professional assistance towards bringing their claims to the franchise before the government. Burke wished, naturally enough, that his son could have made his entry into public life in less contentious circumstances. 'As your father has done,' Burke wrote to his son, 'you must make enemies of many of the rich, of the proud, and of the powerful. . . . I and you began in the same way.' Richard Burke was, however, not a success—he was described by Wolfe Tone as the most impudent and opinionative fellow that he had ever known in his life—but the circumstances were exceedingly difficult. Burke himself aided the Catholic cause by an important open *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe, M.P.* (1792). This letter undoubtedly contributed to form a reasonable public opinion on the subject, and the Catholics were given the parliamentary franchise in 1793. If this measure had gone further it might have been really effective. It was, however, unaccom-

panied by the concession of full political rights, and the Catholics remained excluded from Parliament, from the Civil Service, and from the judiciary. Burke, against sudden change as always, was for granting them full rights by degrees on the basis of the existing parliamentary representation. He never rated high, either as regards England or Ireland, the power or importance of a Member of Parliament as such, and he feared that a democratic measure of Parliamentary Reform would have placed the country to an increasing extent in the power of a mass of illiterate voters.

Henceforth Burke, though a voluminous correspondent on Irish affairs, was no more than a spectator of the tragic events which sowed the seeds of a long and disastrous alienation of Catholic Ireland from England and the Empire. The society of United Irishmen under Wolfe Tone had arisen in 1791, and was manifesting separatist tendencies. In 1794 came the disastrous episode of Lord Fitzwilliam's Viceroyship. Fitzwilliam, Burke's friend and Rockingham's nephew, was allowed to go to Ireland although professedly in favour of Catholic emancipation; Pitt, occupied with the French war, was ill-acquainted with the situation in Ireland; the Castle Junta quarrelled with Fitzwilliam, who was recalled. Religious animosities found expression in turbulent or seditious associations. The United Irishmen entered into relations with the Jacobins, and Burke himself was now seeing all things from one point of view and one only, viz. their bearings on Jacobinism. The conception grew upon him of the Catholic Church as a bulwark against social disintegration, a conception which was subsequently to have wide reactions. The education of the priesthood pre-

sented, in particular, a pressing problem. The continental seminaries in which the Irish priests had hitherto been trained were now closed to them by the war, and the question of founding a college in Ireland for that purpose forced itself on the attention of the government. Burke was strongly against the establishment of any college in which Dublin Castle officialism should have any hand; nothing good, he conceived, could come from that quarter. He went further than some of the Catholics themselves in demanding that clerical education should be under exclusively clerical control. The new foundation of Maynooth, of which his frequent correspondent Dr. Hussey was appointed the first president, did not accordingly meet with his entire approval.¹

Burke had been nearly a year in his grave before so many hopes were extinguished by the rebellion of '98. Would he have approved of the subsequent union of the two legislatures? The question irresistibly suggests itself, though no certain answer can be returned. He had previously expressed himself as, on the whole, against it, but he might have acquiesced provided that it had been accompanied, as it was not accompanied, by a fuller measure of Catholic emancipation.

¹ See Lecky, vii 127 *sq.*, on the foundation of Maynooth. Lecky adversely criticises Burke's attitude towards the Maynooth question, but it was a thoroughly reasoned attitude. Marvellous as it now seems, at any rate one Catholic petition protested against the exclusion of Protestants from the new foundation, on the ground that religious differences would thereby be accentuated

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CHAPTER XIV

BURKE AND THE WAR WITH FRANCE—CONCLUSION OF THE HASTINGS IMPEACHMENT

(1792-1795)

WE have brought Burke's life up to the threshold of the longest and, save one, the greatest war in which England has ever been engaged ; a war in which, more than in any other, she showed herself fruitful in leaders by sea and land. Few things bring home to us so clearly the continuity of our national tradition of policy and character than a comparison of this war with its successor, in its progress abroad, its reactions at home, and the types of virtue and achievement which it evoked. The war which began in 1793 was also occasioned by the violation of a neutral zone, and there was much in its origin to support Burke's conception of it as a war against an 'armed doctrine'. To the new France—his words have a strangely familiar sound to our own ears—

the will, the wish, the want, the liberty, the toil, the blood of individuals is nothing. Individuality is left out of their scheme of government. The state is all in all. Everything is referred to the production of force ; afterwards everything is trusted to the use of it. It is military in its principle, in its maxims, in its spirit and in all its movements. The state has dominion and conquest for its sole objects ; dominion over minds by proselytism, over bodies by arms.

We of to-day can judge more justly than was possible for intervening generations a plan of campaign which, conducted as it was in conjunction with allies, appears indecisive and unconcentrated. We can even make some allowance for the excesses of the repressive policy which Pitt, with Burke's cordial agreement, exercised at home. Burke, in his day, blamed Pitt for 'dispersing his forces', and, on the occasion of the Quiberon expedition, declared himself in favour of 'reprisals'. Even those who question most strongly the wisdom of the anti-peace policy which Burke advocated in 1796 must admit the superb quality of the advocacy. Never since then, as those must have felt who turned over the *Letters on a Regicide Peace* during 1914-18, has a call to war found such utterance.

The prophet had been for some years gaining over the statesman in Burke, and for the rest of his life it gained still further. We have already seen the profound intuitive insight by which, alone of the public men of his time, he penetrated to the core of the Revolutionary movement as already displayed within and soon to be displayed without the country of its birth. He revealed the Revolution, and the war which was its corollary, as something, if not new in itself, then absolutely new in reference to current estimates. It is difficult for us now to realise the originality which he displayed in his reiterated warnings that this Revolution was not as other revolutions and that this war would not be as other wars. There was indeed much excuse for the conventional view of its earlier stages which was held by most of Burke's contemporaries. The eighteenth century, a period of chronic if intermittent campaigning, had had plenty of experience of

wars prompted by motives that had acquired a prescriptive respectability, and waged according to certain conventions. Kings, employing professional armies, fought for glory or for territory, and in so doing moved within an accepted circle of ideas. There were traditional dynastic interests to be furthered; there was the 'balance of power' to be maintained; and, afterwards, there was generally some rearrangement of territorial boundaries which took no account of the real or the professed wishes of the inhabitants. But the phenomenon was soon to arise of an intense national feeling expressed by national levies of men and money, of citizen armies which were to express France far more truly than the rapid succession of her governments. The propagandist ardour which, failing European comparisons, has been compared to that of militant Islam, the almost religious patriotism which was to inspire the military democracy of France, were things beyond the philosophy of contemporary statesmen and diplomatists. Burke saw these things with increasing clearness, and saw in them an inexhaustible reserve of strength. But he stood alone. The old comparison of Burke urging a holy war against Jacobinism with Peter the Hermit preaching the first Crusade neglects the fact that, to judge by immediate results, the Hermit was a far more successful agitator.

He was indeed doing his best to educate English opinion as to the immediate tendencies of the Revolution, but he had no voice whatever in the counsels of the nation. Many a little clerk in a government office, he wrote in a letter, of whom his correspondent would never have heard, had far more influence than himself, even in those affairs to which he had devoted

years of study and thought. It may be said indeed that, however correct may have been his prognosis of the tendencies of Revolutionary France, he deserved to have no influence on practical policy. Special pleading, for or against Pitt, for or against Fox, finds its opportunity where considerations based on a situation as it presented itself at the time are easily confused with considerations based on a subsequent knowledge of the event. But no amount of special pleading can justify Burke's premature demand for foreign intervention in the affairs of France, for war against the Revolution simply because it was the Revolution. His idea that the Emperor and the King of Prussia could have been expected to combine in a disinterested crusade against Jacobinism was about as chimerical as his idea that the French would have accepted a restored monarchy forced on them at the sword's point. So much may be readily granted, and, in any case, eminence in a practical statesmanship which he had scant opportunity of ever exercising forms no part of Burke's claim to immortality. But to say that, having urged over and over again that the French Revolution was analogous to a thought-movement, it was unreasonable in him to call for brute force to crush it, is beside the mark. He called for much more than brute force. He would have opposed the Jacobins with a spirit equal to their own; he demanded that a crusade to save the established order of Europe should be informed by as austere an idealism as that which dignified the more heroic figures of the Revolution. His apprehensions of the possible effects of the Revolution on his own country were no doubt becoming as unreasonably exaggerated as was Pitt's

translation of them into practical effect. However, some allowance must be made. Historians may explain to us that much of such unrest as existed was due less to French influence than to a legitimate discontent with political conditions at home, and may be regarded, in fact, as the growing pains of modern democracy. But it did not necessarily appear so then, and to men who could not be expected to see more than that French emissaries were active in England and Ireland, and that representatives of English associations were being sent to the Convention. 'It is easy enough', says Macknight, writing in the middle of the last century, 'to talk glibly and at our ease about the folly of the alarmists of this period, but those who lived through the year 1848 may form some faint conception of the agitation and excitement at the end of 1792'.¹ We of to-day have certain advantages in that particular even over the men who lived through 1848.

The paths of Burke and Fox, which had lain so long together, were now diverging finally and irrevocably. Much they still had in common, including a loathing of cruelty and injustice which, in the full strength in which they held it, is rare indeed. Fox condemned the war *in toto*; Burke condemned both the aims and the methods on which it was to be conducted. The same phenomenon was before them both, but they drew exactly opposite conclusions. The antagonism into which they were led was symbolic

¹ Macknight (iii. 495) makes rather a neat point in contrasting Macaulay's portentous observations (at the end of the second volume of his history) about the narrow escape of European civilisation in 1848 with the same writer's condemnation of Burke's advocacy of war against the Revolution.

of a new and an old political and social order, and was expressed by each with an eloquence that has seldom been heard from the lips of men. Very few epochs in our history have been so fruitful as this decade in striking contrasts of ideas and personalities. The resolution, if not the statesmanship, of Pitt, the protests of Fox, the comments of Burke, all rose to the height of the occasions which inspired them. The war was inevitable, and England was certainly not the aggressor ; yet, to later generations, the spirit in which Fox opposed it has an irresistible appeal. He would have separated—as Burke also would have separated—our aims from those of our allies, and never ceased to protest against a war for the restoration of the Bourbons and of the system for which they stood. He hated to see England embarking on a policy which, though she did not intend it, might well have been fatal to civil, intellectual, and religious freedom on the Continent of Europe. At home he passionately combated the panic spirit which found expression in an elaborate espionage and the harshest of treason trials. He knew well that power and honours would have been his for the asking if he had recanted. But, against every natural temptation, he persevered in an unpopular cause, and it lends him an almost romantic attraction which is necessarily denied to Burke, and denied, also, to the statesman upon whom the burden of responsibility rested.

No conception could have been loftier and more disinterested than that under which, as we shall see, Burke regarded the impending war. Nor can he justly be charged with any intention of abetting the more undesirable features of European despotism.

Though there is every ground for the remark made by his best commentator that, in Burke's intention, the 'restoration of the monarchy and the Church was to be followed by a Bloody Assize', yet he had, as we have seen, hoped that the restoration of Louis XVI. would be followed by a more liberal régime. With no belief in political democracy, and with less confidence than Fox in the political potentialities of average and uninstructed humanity, he cannot be justly accused of indifference to individual liberty. His opposition to the Revolution was, in point of fact, prompted partly by a fear that its results would be inimical to any sane interpretation of such liberty, as well as to any healthy variety in the social order. Yet the inexorable pressure of events had no mercy on Burke, on Fox, or on Pitt. Pitt, who had originally no real intention of interfering in the internal affairs of France, found himself leagued with all the sinister forces of continental reaction. Fox seemed to be his country's enemy in time of war. To what uses Burke's influence was to be converted became plain in the course of years of which he fortunately lived to see only the beginning. His name became identified with a policy that stifled every liberal and legitimate aspiration, with a conservatism that was incredibly blind to the exigencies of a changing society, with much of what renders the early years of the nineteenth century the darkest period in modern English history.

We must perforce be content here with a statement of the more important and the more obvious facts of the situation as it presented itself at that time. Burke may have been mistaken in many things, but he saw that the war, which he wished to hasten, was

bound to come, and that when it came it would call for the supreme efforts of the country. The only immediate effects of Fox's loudly expressed sympathy with the Revolution were to antagonise the large majority of his countrymen, to distract further the distracted Whigs, and to invest his party with the anti-national character which it retained for years. Burke wished for a ministry of 'all the talents' to be formed, but Fox refused to join Pitt except on unreasonable terms. This meant a schism in the Whig party. The 'old Whigs', led by Burke's old friend the Duke of Portland, leaving the 'new Whigs' led by Fox, joined the government, and Burke now formally took his seat on the Treasury Bench. Fox remained at the head of a remnant who, however small, 'would all have been hanged for him', as was said at the time. Before the impending war had been long in operation, the breach between him and Burke, hitherto perhaps reparable, widened hopelessly. In a long and confidential letter to the Duke of Portland,¹ Burke animadverted with a rather vindictive bitterness and in great detail on the conduct of Fox and the minority. This letter was, it may be added, sold to a piratical bookseller by a dishonest secretary of Burke's, and, to his intense annoyance, was published some time later with the exciting title of *Fifty-four heads of impeachment against the Right Hon. C. J. Fox*.

The following December (1792) was to afford Burke two field days in the House of Commons. When hostilities seemed imminent, Fox proposed to renew our interrupted diplomatic relations with Paris by

¹ *Observations on the conduct of the Minority* (1793), *Works*, iii. 467.

sending an ambassador to the Convention. This was bitterly opposed by Burke in a speech which demanded truceless war with the Jacobins, and pointed this demand with a Virgilian quotation in the grand manner :

*Tum vos, o Tyru, stirpem et genus omne futurum
Exercete odiis, cinerique haec mittite nostro
Munera Nullus amor populis nec foedera sunt*

* * * * *

*Litora litoribus contraria, fluctibus undas
Imprecor, arma armis ; pugnent ipsique nepotesque* ¹

A few days afterwards, the grand manner missed fire. Burke was to speak on a motion for the registration of aliens, and on his way to the House called at the Foreign Office. There the Under-Secretary showed him a dagger, with the information that, as there was reason to believe, a French order for a large number of similar weapons had been placed in Birmingham. Burke borrowed the dagger to show the House, and the manner of its showing startled honourable members, as indeed it was meant to do. At what he judged to be an appropriate moment in his speech, he suddenly produced it from under his coat and flung it on the floor. This proceeding was condemned as somewhat too theatrical. But it probably seemed less so than we might suppose to a House which was more accustomed then than now to strong outbursts of individuality, and was, moreover, accustomed to Burke.²

¹ 'Then do you, o Tyrians, pursue his seed with your hatred for all ages to come' send this guerdon to our ashes. Let no kindness nor truce be between the nations . . . I invoke the enmity of shore to shore, wave to water, sword to sword ; let their battles go down to their children's children'—Mackail's translation.

² What purported to be the identical weapon was, Macknight says, preserved at a farmer's house in Beaconsfield at any rate until the 'fifties or the 'sixties of the nineteenth century. This farmer was also proud of having been the model for Reynold's

War had already broken out (April 1792) between France and Austria allied with Prussia. Pitt did not intervene, nor was there yet any demand from public opinion that he should. Nor was his attitude changed by domestic events in France which soon horrified England, by the imprisonment of Louis XVI. and the Royal family, the rise of the Commune of Paris followed by the September massacres, and the beginning of the struggle which terminated in the victory of the extreme democratic elements called the Mountain over the moderate republicanism of the Girondists. After some initial successes, the forces of the coalition were driven back on the Rhine, and, before the end of the year, the French had conquered Belgium and Mainz, as well as Savoy. Revolutionary France had proved her strength, and the aims of the Convention left no room for doubt. It published, in the crudest manner, an offer of assistance to all peoples desirous of freedom, and instructed its generals to proclaim the sovereignty of the people and the abolition of feudal rights and privileges. The invasion of Holland was next decreed, and, in defiance of treaty agreements, the opening to navigation of the river Scheldt—a direct challenge to the traditional foreign policy of England. In what is perhaps the most stately declaration that has ever come from an English minister, Lord Grenville asserted that England would never consent to this annulment of the political system of Europe in the name of pretended ‘natural rights’. War, now inevitable, was precipitated by the execution of Louis

‘Infant Hercules’. The ‘Dagger Scene’ was caricatured by Gillray, but all to the advantage of Burke, who presents an unexpectedly dignified appearance.

XVI. It was in the evening that the courier arrived with the news, and the audiences immediately left the theatres. No internal event in a foreign country has ever caused such an immediate thrill of horror in this country. The French minister was ordered to leave in eight days. 'It will be a very short war,' said Pitt, 'and certainly over in one or two campaigns.' 'No, sir,' replied Burke, 'it will be a long war, and a dangerous war, but it must be undertaken.'

The war was not, however, to be undertaken in the spirit which Burke advocated. The civilisation of Europe was menaced by, as we may say, a Bolshevik Russia in the middle of it, what was the Scheldt compared to this? Burke cursed the Scheldt vigorously, comparing it, in relation to the magnitude of the interests at stake, to a humble article of domestic convenience. It was, he urged, with the Jacobin minority not the conservative majority of the French people, that we were to fight. The King should be restored to his throne, the émigré nobility to their estates,¹ and we should support those Royalists who were active in France itself, and, as may be remarked, had been unable or unwilling to desert their country. Of the coalition to be formed for this purpose England, and not Austria, was the natural head. The war would call not merely for the utmost vigour in its prosecution but for the concentration of all available forces in a campaign directed straight to Paris. We were, to quote a passage in which he subsequently summed up his views, in a war of a peculiar nature. We were not

¹ Cf. *Works*, III. 451, where Burke says it would be chimerical 'to think of the possibility of a permanent and hereditary royalty where nothing else is hereditary or permanent in point either of personal or corporate dignity'.

the motives that belong to an animal who, in his constitution, is at once adventurous and provident, circumspect and daring; whom his Creator has made, as the poet says, 'of large discourse, looking before and after.' But never can a vehement and sustained spirit of fortitude be kindled in a people by a war of calculation. It has nothing that can keep the mind erect under the gusts of adversity. Even where men are willing, as sometimes they are, to barter their blood for lucre, to hazard their safety for the gratification of their avarice, the passion which animates them to that sort of conflict, like all the short-sighted passions, must see its objects distinct and near at hand. The passions of the lower order are hungry and impatient. Speculative plunder; contingent spoil; future, long adjourned, uncertain booty; pillage which must enrich a late posterity, and which possibly may not reach to posterity at all; these, for any length of time, will never support a mercenary war. The people are in the right. The calculation of profit in all such wars is false. On balancing the account of such wars, ten thousand hogsheads of sugar are purchased at ten thousand times their price. The blood of man should never be shed but to redeem the blood of man. It is well shed for our family, for our friends, for our God, for our country, for our kind. The rest is vanity, the rest is crime.¹

Such was the ideal, the reality was different. If ever a war was forced on a reluctant minister it was this war; nor was Pitt's expression of opinion as above related of hopeful augury in itself. His idea of the *casus belli* was not that of Burke, but it was legitimate and sufficient. We were going to war to protect Holland and Belgium from French aggression, and to prevent Antwerp from becoming a base for the French fleet. A disinterested crusade directed against Jacobinism, and directed towards the restoration of the French monarchy, was not indeed within the region of

¹ *Works*, v. 203.

practical politics ; but Pitt, misunderstanding the peculiar character of the situation, conceived that the war could be conducted on conventional lines. As to the plan of campaign—a campaign which, owing to the impending bankruptcy of France, could end only in one way—we and our allies should proceed on the good old plan, seizing all on which we could lay our hands and indemnifying ourselves when the war should have been successfully concluded. England could not lead by land as well as by sea, and the lines of the land campaign had been laid down by the military powers who were already in the field. Such troops as could be spared must co-operate with other members of the coalition by attacking the French coast ; for our fleet, the French colonial islands would afford an easy prey.

The war conducted on this plan had not been very long in operation before Burke's apprehensions seemed in a fair way to being realised. In a paper addressed primarily to the government,¹ he reviewed the situation at some length. Our aim, he urged, must be to restore the monarchy of France. He did not underrate the enormous difficulties of the task. With one of his lightning flashes of insight, he laid down the conditions on which such a restoration alone seemed possible. It would have to be preceded by the establishment of some sort of power 'equal at least in vigour . . . to a military government'. Whoever claimed a right by birth to govern France, 'must find in his breast, or conjure up in it, an energy not to be ex-

¹ *Remarks on the policy of the Allies* (1793), *Works*, vol. iii. Apart from the *Reflections*, this is Burke's most important statement on the French Revolution itself as distinct from the English attitude to it.

pected, perhaps not always to be wished for, in well-ordered states'. The lawful prince would have to possess, 'in everything but crime, the character of an usurper. No velvet cushions for him. He is to be always (I speak nearly to the letter) on horseback. This opinion is the result of much patient thinking on the subject which I conceive no event is likely to alter.' Napoleon, about this time, was considering whether the British East India Company did not afford better prospects to an artillery officer than the French army.

As to England, Burke feared we should be led into schemes of aggrandisement, invidious as he felt the duty to be of opposing anything that would be likely to increase the power of his own country. The fear of Nemesis, which had haunted him in the American war, rose again before him, as he contemplated our initial successes. We were already in possession of almost all the commerce of the world; our empire in India was 'an awful thing'. For the welfare of Europe, France must not be dismembered, but be a great and prosperous Power. If we were to be drawn aside from the imperative task of restoring France to herself by any aggressive designs, we might not only be beaten at the game of continental diplomacy by far more experienced practitioners, but might lose the war. 'Instead of being at the head of a great confederacy and the arbiters of Europe, we shall by our mistakes break up a great design into a thousand little selfish quarrels, and the enemy will triumph.'

At the end of this paper Burke was visited by one of those 'returns upon himself' which Matthew Arnold noted as so significant and so un-English in him, and of which we have already seen an example. But this

return was not prompted by any doubts as to the ultimate designs of the Providence which ordered human destiny. Few men who indulged as freely as Burke had now come to do in political prediction have ever been so haunted by a sense of its uncertainty. History, he says, can teach as much, provided we learn it 'as a habit and not as a precept'. He reflects on our ignorance of the past, and on the deceptive lights afforded by systematising historians, and does so in language which strangely recalls some familiar lines of Faust.

Mein Freund, die Zeiten der Vergangenheit
Sind uns ein Buch mit sieben Siegeln ;
Was ihr den Geist der Zeiten heisst,
Das ist im Grund der Herren eigner Geist,
In dem die Zeiten sich bespiegeln.

There are some fundamental points in which human nature never changes, but they are few and obvious, and belong rather to morals than to politics ; in politics, on the other hand, anything may happen. As to the present occasion, could any books of history or philosophy have led us to imagine that a condition of things should arise in which property should lose all its influence through the whole of a vast kingdom ? To suppose that this revolution would have been brought about chiefly by men of letters ? That atheism could have become a militant principle ? That military commanders should have been of so little account in a commonwealth cradled in war ? That administrative bodies in a state of the utmost confusion, and of but a momentary duration, should have been able to provide an authoritative government for the purposes of peace and war ? This last event he confesses that he did

not foresee, though, with a justifiable pride, he claims to have foreseen the rest.

His predictions as to the course of the war were only too abundantly verified. By the middle of 1793 Austria, Prussia, England, Holland, Russia, Spain, and all Italy except Venice and Genoa were leagued against France; the early successes of this coalition resulted only in stimulating France to the greatest national effort of which modern history tells; our sea power was dispersed in colonial adventures; the discordant aims of the various members of the coalition rendered impossible the vigour and the concentration which Burke demanded. By the end of 1794 the coalition was melting away, and France was everywhere victorious on land.

Throughout all the distractions of a European convulsion Burke remained constant to his purpose of combating the principles of a subversive despotism as embodied not only in the Convention but, as he seemed to see it, in an individual. Neither on France, nor on Ireland, nor on India did the grasp of his mind relax. The interminable process in Westminster Hall still continued, the tremendous speeches; the examination and the cross-examination of witnesses; the heated arguments on the evidence; the bickerings between Burke and Law; the protests which were handed in from time to time by Hastings, including, on one occasion when he was goaded past endurance, an outburst in Court. It cannot be said that the chief accuser showed to advantage in the later stages of the trial; Burke in his study, and Burke in public, were now more than ever two different people. Law, on one occasion, appealed to what 'the Managers and

counsel owed to their common character'. 'Common!' Burke angrily exclaimed. 'I never can suffer the dignity of the House of Commons to be implicated in the common character of the bar; the learned counsel may look after his own.' While, as listeners were quick to note, Fox was now calling Hastings not the 'prisoner' but the 'gentleman at the bar', Burke's language, which had long lost all dignity, was now losing common decency. 'A fraudulent bullock contractor', 'a man whose origin was low and obscure, bred in vulgar and ignoble habits'—this last absolutely untrue—may serve as a sample. Hastings was indeed a Satanic figure to Burke, but the devil himself (so we are assured) may possess gentlemanly attributes, and Burke's neglect to apply this consideration to the present case reflects only on himself. His language, which can be palliated only on the plea of increasing ill-health and anxiety, furnished only too good an excuse for those who unsuccessfully tried to exclude him from the thanks subsequently voted by the House of Commons to the Managers of the impeachment.¹

Hastings' defence had been opened with, so far as appears, great ability and moderation by Law, who was followed by Dallas and Plumer. Their speeches also were of enormous length, and the defence had lasted throughout the sessions of 1792 and 1793. On its conclusion, yet another debate on the trial took place, in which Burke was called to order. Not the least of his annoyances about this time must have been his colleague Sheridan's assumption of a gay indiffer-

¹ A 'Curious Collection of Mr Burke's abuse of Mr. Hastings' will be found in Debrett's record of the trial. This anthology shows how Burke's language grew steadily more abusive as the trial proceeded.

ence. Being about to make what was professedly but not really an impromptu reply on the 'Begums of Oude' charge, the dramatist is reported to have said that he would 'abuse Ned Law, ridicule Plumer's long orations, please the women, and, with Taylor's help, get triumphantly through the task'. The chief Manager, on the other hand, had no mercy on the Court, on the accused man, on his colleagues, or on himself. By the beginning of 1794 the trial seemed at length to be nearing its end, when Burke, 'feebly supported by Fox,' proposed to put in six folio volumes of printed evidence relating to the causes and conduct of the Mahratta War, a matter which extended over eight years. If he had succeeded in doing so, as to his great and very vocal disappointment he did not, there is no saying when the trial ever would have ended.

So much for Burke in London; we must now follow him for a few moments to those quieter surroundings in which alone he could now retain the full command of his genius. Agitated as his mind might be by the contentions and the irritations of Westminster Hall, it regained tranquillity in his home at Beaconsfield. By direction of the House of Commons the Managers were, at the beginning of 1794, formed into a committee to report on the causes which had contributed to the duration of the trial¹. In their report, which Burke wrote, he supported the contention that the Court should not have decided legal questions in secret session and should not have been bound by the rules of evidence obtaining in the inferior courts, by considerations on the history of the process of impeach-

¹ *Report . . . on the Trial of Warren Hastings, Esquire (1794), Works*, vol. vi.

ment, on the character of the House of Lords as a court of judicature, and on the history and philosophy of the law of evidence. Francis, a very acute critic who had long disliked Burke's rhetoric and by now disliked his principles, considered this report to be 'on the whole the most eminent and extraordinary of all his productions', near our own day, Lord Morley remarks on 'its learning, positiveness, and cool judicial mastery'. Its substance is beyond the present biographer's powers of comment. Nothing, however, can give a better idea of the full reach of Burke's mind than a comparison of this State paper with the exuberance and the fire of the speeches which he was delivering at the same time in Westminster Hall, or with the elaborate splendour of the *Letter to a Noble Lord*.

The fact that the result of the trial had by now become a foregone conclusion did not affect Burke's determination to assert the justice of the cause entrusted to him by the House of Commons in a last culminating effort. On May 28, 1794, being the seventh year and the one hundred and thirty-seventh day of the trial, he began a general reply on the whole of the charges, a reply which lasted no less than nine days. The manner may repel us in which, at the outset, he disclaimed in the strongest manner the amiable suggestion of the defendant's counsel that the Managers would feel happy if Hastings were to establish his innocence, but we have already seen his motive. The case had been, in his view, the subject of the most exhaustive preliminary inquiry by the House of Commons; Hastings' guilt had been affirmed by them; and the solemn charge had been entailed upon him of establishing it before the House of Lords. As

regards his remarks on 'the demeanour of the prisoner at the bar during the course of the trial', we can only repeat that the vivid imaginative faculty which clothed tendencies in concrete symbols and lent an almost palpable form to the horror of the Revolution, saw embodied in Hastings sinister forces of the same order if not of the same magnitude as were threatening the comity of European nations. As to the language which he had applied to the accused, he defended the spirit which had inspired it with the greatest stateliness.¹ He did not conceive that his commission compelled him to imitate the 'emollient' language according to which, for example, adultery was called 'gallantry', and the adulterer 'a man of good fortune, sometimes in French, sometimes in English'. Our Creator had 'moulded revenge into the frame and constitution of man', and this instinct, as moralised and legalised, was the foundation of retributive justice.

For eight subsequent days Burke examined the principles on which Hastings had based his defence, the means of his defence, and the character of the evidence in support of his defence—a feat which, considering the vastness and the complexity of the subject matter, was portentous indeed, but one through which we cannot follow him. He judged, as is now agreed, Hastings' anomalous position, and the transactions which were mainly though not entirely consequent upon that position, by inapplicable standards, and he misapprehended many of the actual situations. Oases there are indeed amidst the vast, impossible tract of argument, abuse, and declamation, oases where, in his noblest manner, the orator expatiates on the nature

¹ *Works*, vii. 470.

of government, and on the principles of distributive justice as found in the most developed as well as in the lowest forms of human association, where he asserts that our mission in India was not one of destruction but of preservation; where he demands that our government should be, so far as possible, conducted in accordance with the laws, the usages, and the sentiments of the governed.

The ninth day of the speech, and the one hundred and forty-seventh day of the trial, saw what was practically the conclusion of Hastings' ordeal, and, as should not be forgotten, of Burke's ordeal also. Having concluded his argument, the orator paused for a few moments, conscious, it would seem, that his words would be the last that he would speak in public—as indeed, with one slight exception, they were. His peroration affords, in its simplicity and solemnity, a striking contrast to the main body of the speech. Burke pointed to the example of France, and besought the tribunal not to slacken justice and so weaken the bands of society. Only once or twice did his organ-notes swell to their full compass as he reminded the Lords that their house still stood, but that it stood in the midst of ruins. Europe seemed every moment to be on the edge of some great change; but there was one thing, and one thing only, which defied all change, and that was the justice which was the attribute of God before worlds were, and would remain when worlds had passed away.

It was not until April 23 of the following year (1795), seven years and two months from the beginning of the trial, that the final scene was enacted. Twenty-nine peers, the remnant who had persevered or sur-

vived to the end, took their seats in the Upper House, wearing their robes. After some preliminary consultation they adjourned to Westminster Hall. Hastings was summoned to the bar, amidst a scene which recalled the palmiest days of the trial. The spectators remarked the altered appearance of Burke, bowed down then by a great sorrow. The Lord Chancellor—Loughborough had replaced Thurlow—put the question to each peer successively, beginning with the junior baron ‘Is Warren Hastings, Esq., guilty or not guilty of High Crimes and Misdemeanours charged by the Commons in the first article of charge?’ George, Lord Douglas (Earl of Morton in Scotland), how says your Lordship: is Warren Hastings guilty or not guilty of the said charge? Whereupon Lord Douglas stood up, uncovered, and laying his right hand on his breast pronounced, “Not guilty, upon my honour”.’

This procedure having been repeated through the remaining peers and the remaining articles, it appeared that Hastings had secured a unanimous acquittal on two of the fifteen counts, and an overwhelming majority in his favour on the rest. The Lord Chancellor, who had himself voted ‘Guilty’ on most of the counts, curtly informed Hastings that he was discharged ‘on paying his fees’.

This acquittal was favourably received at the time, nor, in the circumstances, is this surprising. It has also been endorsed by subsequent, and especially by recent opinion. But Burke showed not the least acquiescence in the accomplished fact. His conviction remained unshaken, his wrath unappeased; and the names of Burke and Hastings go down the ages

linked in an eternal enmity. We may wish that Burke had abated something of what had become the ferocity of personal vindictiveness. We may wish also that he had not grudged Hastings, who had been ruined by the expenses of the trial, the money voted him by the East India Company. We cannot indeed wish that he had made, as Sheridan did some time afterwards, an uninvited movement to shake hands with Hastings in the Pavilion at Brighton—to which, we may add, Hastings responded only by a grave bow, and the expression of a hope that Mr. Sheridan would say in public what he was now saying in private. Burke had now only two more years to live, and no hasty or facile reconciliation could becomingly have closed an antagonism which had found so tremendous and so prolonged an expression.

As to which of the two men, the accuser or the accused, presents himself in a more attractive light during the vast proceedings which we have so slightly sketched, there can be no doubt. Our sympathies go out readily, perhaps in the circumstances too readily, to the man of action as against the man of words. We feel it almost intolerable that a man such as Hastings should have been subjected to an ordeal so far in excess, as it now appears, of any shortcomings with which he may fairly be charged. But in justice to the less appealing figure of the accuser, we must remember certain facts. That many besides Burke considered there to be a *prima facie* case against Hastings we have already seen ; nor was Burke speaking for himself, or even for his party, but for the Commons of England. That the trial should have been so prolonged as to have been exceedingly unjust in its incidental effect was

the fault of no one in particular. If it had been concluded in a reasonable time, the measure of injustice inflicted on Warren Hastings would have been less in itself, and far less apparent to posterity. That Burke's powers were directed to a wrong objective must be admitted, though it did not necessarily appear so then. It must be admitted also that his presentation of the case committed to his charge was marred not merely by many honest misconceptions, but in its later stages by an utterly unbecoming violence. However, by the side of his fifteen years' labour in the cause, as he conceived it, of peoples that he had never seen, faults of taste and temper at any rate are small things.

For all the apparent unsuccess of his efforts, Burke built better than he knew. He could not himself see the indirect yet potent influence of his eloquence and his toil. But he achieved his main purpose of providing an illustrious and spectacular warning which fitly closed the first century of our rule in India. No statue to Burke probably exists to-day throughout the length and breadth of the land which he served so devotedly. Yet he has his claim to be counted among the founders of our Indian Empire. This claim, whether or not it may be held to rest on the part he played in the great impeachment, is none the less securely based on other efforts of which his great parliamentary speeches relative to India are the monument. He was the first parliamentary statesman to devote the whole of his powers to the cause of India; the first to proclaim, and to inspire others to proclaim, that England had a duty to her subject peoples in the East; the first to express in words to which even apathy and hostility could not but listen, what has

been highest in the motives that have since animated a long line of rulers.

Burke had wished to prepare a history of the impeachment in order to justify both the action of the House of Commons and the manner in which he had himself executed his trust. Finding himself unable to undertake it, he solemnly bequeathed the task to his friend Laurence, in the following terms.¹

BATH, *July* 18, 1796.

MY DEAR LAURENCE,

I thank you for employing the short moment you were able to snatch from being useful in being kind and compassionate. Here I am in the last retreat of hunted infirmity. I am, indeed, *aux abois*; but, as through the whole of a various and long life I have been more indebted than thankful to Providence, so I am singularly so in being dismissed, as hitherto I appear to be, so gently from life, and sent to follow those who in course ought to have followed me, whom, I trust, I shall yet, in some inconceivable manner, see and know; and by whom I shall be seen and known. But enough of this.

However, as it is possible that my stay on this side of the grave may be yet shorter than I compute it, let me now beg to call to your recollection, the solemn charge and trust I gave you on my departure from the publick stage. I fancy I must make you the sole operator, in a work in which, even if I were enabled to undertake it, you must have been ever the assistance on which alone I could rely. Let not this cruel, daring, unexampled act of public corruption, guilt, and meanness, go down to a posterity, perhaps as careless as the present race, without its due animadversion, which will be best found in its own acts and monuments. Let my endeavours to save the Nation from that shame and guilt, be my monument, the only one I ever will have. Let everything I have done, said, or written, be forgotten, but this. I have struggled with the great and

¹ *Laurence Correspondence*, p. 53.

the little on this point during the greater part of my active life, and I wish, after death, to have my defiance of the judgements of those who consider the dominion of the glorious Empire given by an incomprehensible dispensation of the Divine Providence into our hands, as nothing more than an opportunity of gratifying, for the lowest of their purposes, the lowest of their passions—and that for such poor rewards, and for the most part, indirect and silly bribes, as indicate even more the folly than the corruption of these infamous and contemptible wretches. I blame myself exceedingly for not having employed the last year in this work, and beg forgiveness of God for such a neglect. I had strength enough for it, if I had not wasted some of it in compromising grief with drowsiness and forgetfulness; and employing some of the moments in which I have been roused to mental exertion, in feeble endeavours to rescue this dull and thoughtless people from the punishments which their neglect and stupidity will bring upon them for their systematic iniquity and oppression. But you are made to continue all that is good of me; and to augment it with the various resources of a mind fertile in virtues, and cultivated with every sort of talent, and of knowledge. Above all make out the cruelty of this pretended acquittal, but in reality this barbarous and inhuman condemnation of whole tribes and nations, and of all the classes they contain. If ever Europe recovers its civilisation, that work will be useful. Remember! Remember! Remember!

* * * * *

Your kindness will make you wish to hear more particulars of me. To compare my state with that of the three first days after my arrival, I feel on the whole less uneasiness. But my flesh is wasted in a manner, which in so short a time, no one could imagine. My limbs look about to find the rags that cover them. My strength is declined in the full proportion; and at my time of life new flesh is never supplied, and lost strength is never recovered. If God has anything to do for me here, here He will keep me. If not, I am tolerably resigned to His divine pleasure. . . .

What more can be added?

CHAPTER XV

BURKE RETIRES FROM PARLIAMENT—DEATH OF HIS
SON—‘LETTER TO A NOBLE LORD’

(1794-1796)

BURKE's active political life was now ended. The impeachment was over; he had nothing more to do in Parliament; and he applied for the Chiltern Hundreds immediately after the formal thanks of the House of Commons had been voted to the Managers (June 1794). So far as he personally was concerned, he had scant reason for satisfaction at the close of his career. The cause had failed to which he had dedicated all his powers for so long. As a statesman he had no very striking practical achievements behind him. His debts were pressing him heavily, and he had no means of meeting them. One consolation, however, remained to him, viz. the anticipation of a brilliant future for his son. Richard Burke had just obtained his first secure foothold in public life, having been appointed secretary to Earl Fitzwilliam, who was proceeding to Ireland as Lord-Lieutenant. Fitzwilliam procured his return for his father's old borough of Malton, and Burke, we are told, greatly enjoyed introducing his son to his former constituents. On the day after their return from the North, Burke gave a dinner-party at his London house to a party of old

friends ; and the younger Burke's health was enthusiastically drunk. That he was, in fact, very ill was evident to every one except apparently to his parents, the assembled company viewing his ' hectic and disordered countenance ' with the gravest forebodings. But Dr. Brocklesby, the physician and friend of so many men during the latter part of the eighteenth century, was convinced that, if what was suspected to be the real nature of the malady were communicated to Burke, he would die before his son. Nothing accordingly was said for the moment

Meanwhile, the offer of a high honour was preparing for Burke. It was determined to make him a peer, whether or not on the personal proposal of the King we do not know, but it is likely enough. There was also, Lord Stanhope believed, a design to annex by Act of Parliament a yearly income to the title for two or three lives—a step only taken in cases of quite exceptional merit.¹ That Burke would have valued this elevation exceedingly there is no doubt. It would have set an official seal on the principles for which he was standing. It would have gratified his affection for his son by enabling him, in his own words, ' to have become in some sort the founder of a family ', and, in any case, Burke had his own fair share of the legitimate ambition which is symbolised by New Place and by Abbotsford. But the man destined to go down to history as Lord Beaconsfield was not to be Burke. Richard Burke was very soon in such a state that further concealment became impossible, and, at the

¹ Stanhope's *Life of Pitt*, II 244, which gives most of what we know as to the proposed peerage. In a letter of Richard Burke's to Windham (*Burke and Windham Correspondence*, p. 109) we find the former saying that he thought a peerage was his father's due.

very time when the patent for his father's peerage is said to have been in preparation, the blow fell. On hearing the news that his son was dying of consumption, Burke broke down utterly. He is said, and we can well believe it, to have scarcely slept or eaten for a week preceding his son's death ; his grief, and that of his wife, was too much for Dr. Brocklesby. The details of Richard Buike's end (August 2, 1794) are of a pathos almost intolerable ; the agonised parents in one room, and, in the next room, their dying son, who endeavoured almost to the last to render the sight of his emaciated face less distressing to them. Buike was apprised of the fact that his son's case had been hopeless for some time, but, since he proceeded to blame himself for an imaginary neglect, this only made matters worse. Laurence, in a letter written a few days after Richard Burke's death, says :

At last I have seen poor Burke. His grief was less intolerable than I had supposed. He took me by surprise or I should then have avoided him. He told me he was bringing his mind by degrees to his miserable situation, and he lamented that he went to see his son after death, as the dead countenance has made such an impression on his imagination that he cannot retrace in his memory the features and air of his living Richard.

No one thought it worth while to proceed with the matter of peerage. Least of all did Burke think so ; as he said, he would not now have given a ' peck of refuse wheat ' for anything that the world called honour. But the urgent question remained of making some financial provision which should relieve him from the load of debt by which he was known to be encumbered, and ease the last years of his wife and himself.

At the suggestion, it is said, of the King, Pitt wrote to Burke offering him a pension of £1500 a year, the highest amount that could be granted from the Civil List, at the same time giving him to understand that this was to be only an instalment of a larger provision which would be proposed in Parliament in due course. Burke replied to a further letter from the Prime Minister in a letter which may be quoted.

BEACONSFIELD, *Sept* 19, 1794

DEAR SIR,

The unfortunate inhabitants of this house are much obliged to you for the very kind and consolatory letter which I received from you this morning . . .

As for us, though we can feel neither this nor anything else with real pleasure we feel it with very sincere gratitude. If I were to consider myself only, whatever was the most obscure and the least ostentatious would be most suitable to the present temper of my mind, and what must continue the same to the end of my short existence. Whilst my dear son lived, there were certainly objects which I had at heart, the smallest of which, in my present forlorn state, would only argue the most contemptible vanity. As to other things I cannot be equally indifferent, nor indeed ought I.

My first object is the payment of my debts, that I may stand as clear with individuals as I trust I do with the public. I know this object enters into your plan. I am to say that these debts were stated by my son below their real amount. When I came to examine them with accuracy I found it so. He too was sensible of this. But he was delicate with regard to you and the public, and having a resolute and sanguine mind, he was willing to take his succession a little encumbered and to trust to good management and good fortune to support these debts or to clear them off. I hope, however, this affair has not been so much below the mark as to make any serious difficulty in your arrangements.

As to the provision to be made by Parliament, I wish for no augmentation in this respect. If the whole pension

be made up to twenty-five hundred clear, to our own personal ease it is sufficient, without obliging us late in life to change its whole scheme, which, whether wise or justifiable or not, is now habitual to us, and, in truth, we are little in a condition to make any new arrangement. Without, therefore, troubling you further, we leave the whole matter entirely to your generosity, and your liberal sentiment. I am heartily sorry to be so troublesome.

I have the honour to be, with the most sincere respect and gratitude, etc.

EDM. BURKE.

Burke was, however, to be disappointed in the manner in which this further provision was to be made. Pitt did not after all bring the matter before Parliament. His reasons are unknown, but it may well have been that he feared an opposition which would have pained Burke himself. Burke's advocacy of the war was becoming unpopular, and the war itself demanded a stringent economy. Pitt advised the King to make Burke a grant from a fund available for the purpose, a fund known as the four and a half per cents, the product of some taxation in the West Indies. Burke received £3700 a year in all. It was a generous sum, and a far larger sum, of course, then than now. But, even on the narrowest ground, it was not excessive for a statesman who had saved the country so much unproductive expenditure, and had enjoyed only the briefest spell of office during a public career of nearly thirty years.

Burke was now at ease financially, but his plight in other respects was sad indeed. Having given up his London house, probably the worst thing that he could have done in the circumstances, he retired into seclusion at Beaconsfield, whence rumours of his condition reached the outside world. Years afterwards the country folk

used to tell inquiring visitors that Burke never again entered Beaconsfield Church, and carefully avoided passing within sight of the place where his son lay. Some uncontrollable emotion which he exhibited on suddenly seeing Richard Burke's old horse at grass, and on being recognised by the animal, gave rise to reports that he was actually out of his mind. No more visitors were asked to Beaconsfield. The harvest home which had hitherto been celebrated 'with all the profusion of Irish hospitality' was discontinued. A friend from Ireland was shocked at his appearance, his chest had shrunk and his face showed traces of extreme mental anguish. For some time he seemed to take no interest in anything, and scarcely ever looked at a newspaper.

Time did its work gradually. He began to correspond with various friends, especially about Irish affairs, and in the course of the bad winter of 1795-96 he addressed to Pitt his tract, to which we have already alluded, called *Thoughts on Scarcity*. At the end of 1795 two events occurred which roused him to a display of all his old form. On one of them, viz. the first of a series of proposals for peace with France, we will touch subsequently; the other claims immediate attention. The amount of Burke's pensions, as soon as the details became known, formed the subject of sarcastic comment in the opposition newspapers. Pensions, as we see from the definition in Johnson's Dictionary, carried with them disparaging associations which do not appear to have attached to the most unabashed sinecurism, and it is certainly true that political services of no high character had often been rewarded in this manner. If Burke had looked at the

Morning Chronicle he would have seen his pension regarded as the reward of political apostasy, but attacks of this kind he would have disregarded in any case. Another such attack he did not feel inclined to disregard. On the occasion of the debate on Pitt's Treason Bill in the Upper House (November 13, 1795), two peers distinguished themselves by some stupid animadversions on Burke and his pension. Lord Grenville made a spirited and adequate defence of the action of the Crown in granting the pension, of Burke's action in receiving it, and of the part which he had himself played in the matter. Windham rushed to champion his friend in the House of Commons. But this did not satisfy Burke, who was wounded in his most sensitive spot; his spirit flared up, and he donned his full fighting panoply.

Major Pendennis, it will be remembered, considered an affectation of republicanism to be as graceful in a youthful patrician as it was odious in one of maturer years, and Burke's 'youthful' Duke of Bedford was then about thirty. The war was, he had alleged, being prosecuted without regard to the interests and wishes of the people; a perfectly fair assertion. But he went on to refer to pensions 'almost unparalleled in profusion' lavished on the very man who had been once distinguished as the advocate of a 'rigid parsimony', but who had since contributed to create and maintain an unpopular and costly war. The Earl of Lauderdale, who had on a previous occasion urged some apparently untenable objection to the employment of the fund above referred to for pension purposes, went further. He named Mr. Burke as the man who was to have an enormous

pension for endeavouring to inculcate doctrines adverse to the principles of freedom. The Earl, however, Burke regarded as a very secondary personage, and, waving him away into space, he concentrated his attention on the more conspicuous target. He had a literary precedent for inveighing against ducal ineptitude, but Junius attacking a Duke is one thing, and Burke quite another. His feelings towards the Duke of Bedford, which in speaking to his friends he probably condensed into a very brief formula, his reflections on the Duke's intelligence and taste, and on some other matters, including his own career, of greater importance, he expressed in a pamphlet—a pamphlet which is called by Macaulay the most splendid repartee in the language, and is said by Hazlitt to have been the work which first kindled his interest in literature. Early in 1796 there appeared *A Letter from the Right Hon. Edmund Burke to a Noble Lord¹ on the attacks made upon him and his pension in the House of Lords, by the Duke of Bedford and the Earl of Lauderdale, early in the present session of Parliament*

Having nothing else to do, Burke was able to devote every care to the composition of this letter. Though its arrangement seems at first sight rather haphazard, there is in fact a good deal of art in the way in which he raises an exceedingly imposing superstructure on the somewhat restricted foundation supplied him. In point of style it is the most elaborately wrought, the most gorgeous, of all his works. Macaulay, in pointing out the progressive richness which Burke's style assumed, regarded the contrast between the

¹ Earl Fitzwilliam.

plainness of the essay on the *Sublime and Beautiful* and the richness of this letter as something extraordinary, especially considering that Burke was young when he wrote the first and old when he wrote the second. But Burke was always master of two styles ; he could, when in his study, write plainly and soberly even on the Warren Hastings impeachment ; and the feature to which Macaulay alludes seems easily explicable. The style of his earliest works certainly conforms, in its simple propriety and grace, to the general prose standard which it was one of the literary achievements of the eighteenth century to have perfected. But the *Vindication of Natural Society* and the *Sublime and Beautiful* had no connection with a practical purpose or with the spoken word, nor, more especially, were they concerned with topics calculated to excite the writer’s feelings. As soon as Burke’s feelings are stirred he becomes the orator at once , as soon as he begins to correspond in public affairs with Rockingham or Richmond he addresses them, to quote the hackneyed anecdote, as though he were addressing a public meeting.

Burke’s oratorical style certainly grew more copious and richer in metaphor as he grew older. But this is not an uncommon trait in orators ; it is observable, to take a literary example from a different field, in the later as compared with the earlier sermons of Cardinal Newman. It is not a question of an increasing redundancy. Burke’s prose is indeed the prose of oratory, and, as such, is not now very congenial to a taste which affects above all things concision and delicacy in prose style, and demands something subtler than those broad and strong effects which are the

special province of rhetoric. But Burke is never, strictly speaking, redundant. He uses, as by instinct, all those natural devices of oratory which give a superficial impression of redundancy, but he charges them with substance and meaning. His antitheses are real and not verbal antitheses; his adjectives are never otiose, but always add something; the substance of the idea is always reinforced with each successive presentation. The change which overtook his style was, in truth, the natural result of changing events working upon a maturing genius; neither Burke nor his world were the same in 1790 as in 1770. Events arose in India and in France to move him more and more; the prophet gained upon the statesman; an intenser feeling, a richer fund of ideas, demanded an increasing warmth, an increasing fulness of expression. As regards this letter, the motive which prompted it was personal rather than public, but Burke was none the less deeply moved. The loftiest vein of political reflection, a wealth of vivid imagery, sometimes grotesque, sometimes of the kind that dazzles and overwhelms, are expressed in a style which has every literary merit save that of reserve. Short, sharp sentences relieve others of a sonorous amplitude and a rich harmony of cadence. Those who desiderate the delicate irony, the light and quick thrust and parry, which have distinguished other encounters of this kind will turn in vain to the *Letter to a Noble Lord*. What they will find in it is something rarer than the softer literary graces—Burke at his fullest volume, the personal issues involved floating on an irresistible stream of thought and emotion.

The literary sources from which Burke's prose was nourished were many, including, besides Latin oratory

and history, the English prose writers and divines of the seventeenth century. But his style is instinct also with more vital elements than those derived from books. A seeing eye, and a sympathy which counts nothing in human life and work as too common for literary expression, are reflected everywhere, and reflected especially in his metaphors. All is fish that comes into his net, and a great deal does come; he cares no more than Homer for the dignity of the comparison so long as there is no mistake about the resemblance. One principal feature of his metaphorical wealth is derived from an acquaintance, in which he resembled Johnson, with the technique of all manner of trades and crafts, with a great variety of what the eighteenth century called ‘modes of living’. Burke could, from all accounts, talk to any one about his ‘shop’. A contemporary reader of the *Reflections on the French Revolution* is reported to have shut the book up when he had got a little way, saying he wanted a physician to explain one allusion, a carpenter to explain the next, and so on. In this letter, as elsewhere, his imagery is extensive and peculiar. Giants are not generally distinguished by lightness of touch, and Burke often rides his similes to death. It is to this characteristic that we certainly owe one astonishing effect, viz. the Windsor Castle comparison, to be cited later, which depends for much of its power upon the detailed manner in which it is worked out. But the following example, in spite of its professional accuracy and gusto, astonishes us in a different way. The French revolutionary leaders are butchers, and have marked the Duke of Bedford down for their natural prey.

Their only question will be . . . how he cuts up, how he tallows in the caul, or on the kidneys? . . . the sans-culotte carcass butchers . . . are pricking their dotted lines upon his hide, and like the print of the poor ox that we see in the shop window at Charing Cross, alive as he is, and thinking no harm in the world, he is divided into rumps and sirloins and briskets, and into all sorts of pieces for roasting and boiling and stewing.

Elaborating the cat and the mouse, he refers to 'the whiskers of that little long-tailed animal that has long been the game of the grave, demure, insidious, spring-tailed, velvet-pawed, green-eyed philosophers'; and every adjective tells, including those applied to the mouse, *i.e.* the Duke. References to 'carcasses' and 'offal', as usual with Burke when he was angry, occur twice in a few pages; the place of Job's repentance is designated as a 'dunghill', which is not according to the Authorised Version. He compares his own skin to the skin of John Zisca stretched on a drum to animate Europe to battle. He compares the Duke, or rather his estates, to a whale equipped with fins, spiracles, ribs, whalebone, and blubber complete—a whale rather as it appears on the wall of a school, with explanations beneath, than in its native element. In another vein we have 'the French unplumb the dead for bullets to assassinate the living'; and, within a few lines, the famous 'I was not swaddled and rocked and dandled into a legislator. . . . At every turnpike I met I was obliged to show my passport. . . .'

As regards the Duke, Burke gives his antagonist just a taste of the quality which the Nabob of Arcot's creditors had already experienced. Unhampered by any false modesty, he imparts some elementary instruction to 'the poor rich man' on the nature and the

extent of his own services to the country, on the difference between ‘ parsimony ’ and ‘ economy ’ in the expenditure of public money ; he urges the contrast between the Duke’s ‘ few and idle years ’ and his own lifetime of service ; he reminds his ‘ youthful censor ’ that the merely censorial virtues were, according to the old-fashioned ideas in which he himself had been brought up, not those best becoming a young man of rank. But, save for some leonine growls of this kind, Burke is not much concerned to crack a nut with his Nasmyth hammer. His adversary had undesignedly presented him with the opportunity of vindicating his public career, and he seized it. The *Letter to a Noble Lord* has not, and could not have, the intimate personal interest attaching to another *Apologia pro vita sua* written, in somewhat similar circumstances, by one who may be regarded as his own analogue in the sphere of religion. Only once or twice is the personal note deeply struck, when he refers to the death of his son. Burke’s *Apologia* moves for the most part on the public stage, is concerned with important events in which he had himself played his part, and, as such, is the true mirror of his life :

*quo fit ut omnis
Votiva pateat veluti descripta tabella
Vita semis*

Burke shows great skill in interweaving the personal and the public aspects of his defence, and in presenting, then dropping and subsequently reinforcing various topics of appeal. The personal side of the matter, his sorrowful and desolate old age, is referred to at the start, and then, by an easy transition, he passes to the affairs of France. He next, in the first main

section of the letter, deals with the purpose which had guided his own economical reforms, illustrating the essential difference between innovation and reform. He did not, however, claim that the bounty of the Court was justified on that ground, but rather on the ground afforded by the whole of his public career, including those silent years of self-preparation which had preceded it. ('I did not come into Parliament to con my lesson. I had earned my pension before ever I set foot in St. Stephen's Chapel.') The Duke of Bedford was, in any case, the last man who ought to question the general trend of a policy which aimed at keeping him safe 'in that station which alone renders him my superior'. He was also the last man who should talk of 'excessive grants from the Crown', and Burke proceeds to an effective rhetorical contrast between the circumstances of his own grant and those of the enormous grants which the house of Russell had received from the Crown out of the estates of the mediæval church. It was lawful for its present possessor to enjoy this inheritance, and it was to be hoped that he would use it to honour both his ancestry and his posterity; but Burke himself was desolate; he had no one now to meet his enemies in the gate. A more than intrinsic interest attaches to the passage immediately succeeding the famous lament for his son. The second paragraph of the following extract is said to have been instanced by Burke himself, in discussing the purely literary value of his writings, as the passage which had cost him the most trouble, and which, as he thought, was the most successful.¹

¹ De Quincey (*Essay on Rhetoric*, *Works*, vol. x) said he had good verbal authority for this statement, and that Burke himself

The crown has considered me after long service : the crown has paid the Duke of Bedford by advance He has had a long credit for any service which he may perform hereafter. He is secure, and long may he be secure, in his advance, whether he performs any services or not. But let him take care how he endangers the safety of that constitution which secures his own utility or his own insignificance ; or how he discourages those who take up even puny arms to defend an order of things which, like the sun of heaven, shines alike on the useful and the worthless. His grants are engrafted on the public law of Europe, covered with the awful hoar of innumerable ages. They are guarded by the sacred rules of prescription, found in that full treasury of jurisprudence from which the jejuneness and penury of our municipal law has, by degrees, been enriched and strengthened. This prescription I had my share (a very full share) in bringing to its perfection.¹ The Duke of Bedford will stand as long as prescriptive law endures ; as long as the great, stable laws of property, common to us with all civilised nations, are kept in their integrity, and without the smallest intermixture of laws, maxims, principles, or precedents of the grand Revolution. They are secure against all changes but one. The whole revolutionary system, institutes, digest, code, novels, text, gloss, comment, are, not only not the same, but they are the very reverse, and the reverse fundamentally, of all the laws on which civil life has hitherto been upheld in all the governments of the world. The learned professors of the rights of man regard prescription, not as a title to bar all claim, set up against all possession—but they look on prescription as itself a bar against the possessor and proprietor. They hold an immemorial possession to be no more than a long continued, and therefore an aggravated injustice.

Such are *their* ideals ; such *their* religion, and such *their*

judged the passage by its conformity with a formal canon, viz that ‘a key passage in a rhetorical performance should involve a thought, an image, and a sentiment’ Hazlitt considered the Windsor Castle passage to be ‘the most splendid in Burke’s writings’.

¹ Sir George Savile’s Act, called The *Nullum Tempus* Act (Burke’s note).

law. But as to *our* country and *our* race, as long as the well-compacted structure of our church and state, the sanctuary, the holy of holies of that ancient law, defended by reverence, defended by power, a fortress at once and a temple,¹ shall stand inviolate on the brow of the British Sion—as long as the British monarchy, not more limited than fenced by the orders of the state, shall, like the proud Keep of Windsor, rising in the majesty of proportion, and girt with the double belt of its kindred and coeval towers, as long as this awful structure shall oversee and guard the subjected land—so long the mounds and dykes of the low, fat, Bedford level will have nothing to fear from all the pickaxes of all the levellers of France. As long as our sovereign lord the king, and his faithful subjects, the Lords and Commons of this realm—the triple cord which no man can break; the solemn, sworn, constitutional frank-pledge of this nation; the firm guarantees of each others' being and each others' rights, the joint and several securities, each in its place and order, for every kind and every quality of property and of dignity—as long as these endure, so long the Duke of Bedford is safe. and we are all safe together—the high from the blights of envy and the spoliation of rapacity, the low from the iron hand of oppression and the insolent spurn of contempt. Amen! and so be it: and so it will be.

*Dum domus Aeneae Capitoli immobile saxum
accolet, imperiumque pater Romanus habebit.*²

Burke then proceeds to further reflections on the Revolution, on the danger which it imparted to all property, including that of the Duke of Bedford, and on the terrible character of a government consisting in an oligarchy of philosophers. ('Nothing can be conceived more hard than the heart of a thoroughbred metaphysician.') He ends on a personal note, and a

¹ *Templum in modum arcis* Tacitus, of the temple of Jerusalem (Burke's note).

² 'While the house of Aeneas shall dwell by the steadfast Capitoline rock, and the lord of Rome hold sovereignty' (Mackail).

graceful one, referring to his friendship with the Duke's uncle, Admiral Lord Keppel. Burke had stood by the Admiral's side years before, when he was court-martialed at Portsmouth on an unfounded charge of neglect of duty. Keppel would have been astonished indeed if he had lived to see his nephew censuring Burke for refusing to support ‘ a peace with regicide ’. ‘ But that,’ he concludes, ‘ is high matter, and ought not to be mixed up with anything of so little account as what may belong to me, or even to the Duke of Bedford.’

CHAPTER XVI

FINAL PHASE—LETTERS ON REGICIDE PEACE—DEATH

(1796-1797)

BURKE was now increasingly conscious that he had not long to live, a prospect in which he seemed only too willing to acquiesce. As he had just informed the world in stately and resigned fashion, there was nothing whatever left in his own life that led him to desire its prolongation. However, long habit had become a second nature which even now would not be denied, one task, to which he had pointed at the end of his *Letter to a Noble Lord*, yet remained to his hand. With the extinction of his personal hopes, and with the measure of recovery from a desolating grief that time had brought him, his concentration on the affairs of the nation became even more intense. Here, as always with him, it is not the justice, as it now seems, of his judgement on the facts of a given situation that is necessarily of most account, but the reflective and imaginative energy which the situation elicited from him. He was now, as he conceived, saving the sum of things, saving civilisation itself, and it is this conviction which inspires a commentary solemnised by the shadow of death.

He now saw things, English, Irish, European, from one point of view and that only. Jacobinism, which had long been an obsession with him, had now become an all-absorbing obsession, and, as we have often enough seen, Burke's conceptions must be magnified to the scale of an emotional and a mental capacity such as his. Even his command of language was barely adequate to express his loathing of the new spirit that was menacing the ancient social and religious fabric of Europe, a spirit of which he felt the almost palpable presence approaching nearer and nearer to all he held most dear. 'Out of the tomb of the murdered monarchy in France has arisen a vast, tremendous, unformed spectre, in a far more terrific guise than any which ever yet has overpowered the imagination and subdued the fortitude of man.' Burke fought it literally to his dying breath, his intellect shining undimmed through a wasting physical frame.

In sober fact, the contrast between the internal and the external manifestations of the spirit which was working across 'a slender dyke of twenty-four miles' might well have appeared to those who had eyes to see as something absolutely preternatural. In France itself the Revolution was working itself out through a series of events unprecedented in the history of civilised man, as the moderate republicanism of the Girondists failed and the Committee of Public Safety, the Committee of General Security, and the Commune of Paris, rose upon its ruins; as, under the stress of military and economic exigencies, the Terror began; as the Queen was executed, the Catholic religion proscribed and the Worship of Reason instituted; as the Hébertists and the Dantonists suc-

cessively fell and, under the dictatorship of Robespierre and the Committee of Public Safety, the Terror was organised into a system ; as there followed in rapid succession the Thermidorian reaction and the fall of Robespierre ; the resumption of power by a distracted Convention ; the royalist insurrectionary movement known as the White Terror ; and finally, following the proscription of the Montagnards by the Convention, a demand for constitutional government. There then came the proclamation of the constitution of 1795 with its executive of five Directors, the emergence of the young artillery officer who quelled the insurrection of Vendémiaire 13, and the promise of stable government which seemed to be afforded by the new Directory.

Through a succession of short-lived administrations most of which had culminated in bloodshed, Europe had seen France putting forth a marvellous and sustained military effort. The army, by protecting the Revolutionary experiment, had saved what was permanent in it, and Burke, though he would not have expressed it in this way, saw the essential fact.

The Republic of Regicide [he wrote] with an annihilated revenue, with defaced manufactures, with a ruined commerce, with an uncultivated and half depopulated country, with a discontented, distressed and famished people, passing with a rapid, eccentric, incalculable course from the wildest anarchy to the sternest despotism, has actually conquered the finest parts of Europe, has distressed, disunited, deranged and broke to pieces all the rest

Pitt's coalition had, as we have seen, been ineffective. Since the conscription decree had given France half a million or more of fighting men, she had done much

more than hold her numerous enemies in check on her frontiers. The unassisted rising of the royalists of La Vendée had ended in a civil war of extermination. The Duke of York had been driven from Belgium ; the Austrians and Prussians from Alsace , Pichegru had occupied Holland , Prussia had made a separate peace of which she was later to reap a bitter harvest, and her example had been followed by Spain. The plan of utilising the anti-republican elements in the west of France was at length adopted, and had resulted in the disastrous failure of Quiberon. To the French, a war of defence had become a war of conquest. While a small number of deputies would have been willing to secure a European peace by granting independence to Belgium and restoring the Rhine provinces to the Empire, the majority, whether Girondists, Thermidorians or Montagnards, aspired to extend the frontiers of their country to the Rhine or to the Meuse.

In England the land part of the war had been prosecuted vigorously at the beginning, if to little purpose. The Convention, in its every action, aim, and word, had excited a general detestation, and some compensation was found for failure by land as island after island from the colonial empire of France fell to our fleet. But, by the third year, feeling as to the war had changed. Business men were beginning to feel its effects on commerce ; the poor on prices ; bread riots began, and Pitt and the King were hooted. Early in 1795 Grey brought the question of peace before the House of Commons. By the middle of that year nothing remained of the coalition save England and Austria, and Austria was wavering. Lord Auckland, in the

course of the autumn, published a pamphlet urging England to recognise the situation, to abandon hope of restoring the *ancien régime*, to accept the Directory as a fact, and to make peace on the best terms procurable. Burke answered Auckland's pamphlet in a long letter which, though nominally addressed to Lord Fitzwilliam, was no doubt intended for circulation among members of the government, and remained in manuscript until fifteen years after its author's death. This, so-called, *Fourth Letter on a Regicide Peace*¹ is, whatever may have been the reason, distinguished by a general lightness and good humour which Burke did not often show in his later years. It is all very well, he says most characteristically, to talk of 'France' and 'the returning honour and generosity of France'. Blessings on him who invented 'abstraction, personification, and impersonals . . . the first of all soporifics'. Put it in the concrete, think of the individuals; think of Rewbel, Tallien, Isabeau and Legendre; and talk of amity with *them*. Later on his fierce irony breaks out as he describes, in his best manner, an imaginary reception in London of an embassy from the Jacobins :

Tallien will make an excellent figure at Guildhall at the next sheriff's feast. He may open the ball with my Lady Mayoress. But this will be after he has retired from the public table, and gone into the private room for the enjoyment of more social and unreserved conversation with the ministers of state and the judges of the bench. There those ministers and magistrates will hear him entertain the worthy aldermen with an instructing and pleasing narrative of the manner in which he made the rich citizens of Bourdeaux squeak, and gently led them by the public credit of the guillotine to disgorge their anti-revolutionary pelf.

¹ Published in his *Works* (vol. v.) under that title, but really written first of the series.

All this will be the display and the town-talk when our regicide is on a visit of ceremony. At home nothing will equal the pomp and splendour of the *Hôtel de la République*. There another scene of gaudy grandeur will be opened. When his Citizen Excellency keeps the festival, which every citizen is ordered to observe, for the glorious execution of Louis XVI, and renews his oath of detestation of kings, a grand ball of course will be given on the occasion. Then what a hurly-burly; what a crowding; what a glare of a thousand flambeaus in the Square; what a clamour of footmen contending at the door; what a rattling of a thousand coaches of duchesses, countesses, and Lady Marys, choking the way, and overturning each other, in a struggle who should be first to pay her court to the *Citoyenne*, the spouse of the twenty-first husband, he the husband of the thirty-first wife, and to hail her in the rank of honourable matrons, before the four days’ duration of marriage is expired!—Morals, as they were:—decorum, the great out-guard of the sex, and the proud sentiment of honour, which makes virtue more respectable where it is, and conceals human frailty where virtue may not be, will be banished from this land of propriety, modesty and reserve.

We had before an ambassador from the Most Christian king. We shall have then one, perhaps two, as lately, from the most antichristian republic. His chapel will be great and splendid; formed on the model of the Temple of Reason at Paris, while the famous ode of the infamous *Chénier* will be sung, and a prostitute of the street adored as a goddess. We shall then have a French ambassador without a suspicion of Popery. One good it will have: it will go some way in quieting the minds of that synod of zealous Protestant lay elders, who govern Ireland on the pacific principles of polemic theology, and who now, from dread of the pope, cannot take a cool bottle of claret, or enjoy an innocent parliamentary job, with any tolerable quiet.¹

Peace pourparlers were opened by England at Basle, but the question of the Low Countries admitted of no compromise. When, in the spring of 1796, the French

¹ *Works*, v. 426.

arms sustained a serious check at the hands of the Archduke Charles of Austria, Pitt saw the chance of a further attempt, but Napoleon's Italian campaign was much more than counterbalancing reverses on the Rhine. Pitt was bent on peace, the Directory, as soon appeared, had no intention of offering any terms of peace that England could accept; and nothing that Burke could have written would have affected the course of events one way or the other. However, while the above-mentioned overtures were pending, Burke sat down to compose his *First Letter on the Proposals for Peace with the Regicide Directory of France* (1796), to which a second and briefer letter was appended.

That Burke was absolutely right in his estimate of the new France as a menace to Europe was more than amply proved by the events of years which he himself did not live to see. Otherwise, his errors may be found compendiously embodied in his own words, viz. that 'France was formidable not as France but as Jacobin France'. He never perceived the change which had come over the war, nor revised his opinions as to what could be effected against France by force of arms. No one except himself now believed in the possibility of the French monarchy being restored; the armies of France had compelled Europe to recognise her as a Republic; to call the Directory a regicide Directory was, for all that each of the Directors had voted for the death of the king, no more than a rhetorical flourish. We were not now in fact waging war against an 'armed doctrine' but against arms uninformed by any doctrine except that of conquest. The Revolution having long been to Burke more than *L'Infame* to Voltaire, he lumped

everyone connected with it, as Lord Morley remarks, into one utterly indiscriminating category, and exhausted the language of vituperation against the banditti, spoliators, bravos, murderers, assassins who were, as he had said in the *Reflections*, ‘in a drunken delirium from the hot spirit drawn out of the alembic of hell’. There are those who, in view of these aberrations, cannot discuss the *Letters on a Regicide Peace* seriously. Lord Morley, for example, while admitting that they contain ‘passages of fine philosophy, of skilful and plausible reasoning’, and that ‘in splendour of rhetoric, in sustention, they surpass everything that Burke ever wrote’, simply cannot away with them. But these things are, after all, something, they are most of what matters now. They were also, one might almost say, most of what mattered then; even the American speeches, which the same critic cordially admires, were, for any practical effect which they exercised, about on a par with these letters. It may be, but it is surely an exaggerated view, that Burke had been for some years ‘only Demosthenes thundering against Philip or Cicero shrieking against Mark Antony’, yet Demosthenes and Cicero, even while so engaged, produced works which will be read so long as the languages in which they wrote are studied.

Fully conscious that he would not live to see ‘the unravelling of the intricate plot which saddens and perplexes the awful drama of Providence now enacting on the moral theatre of the world’, Burke felt that what he had to say ‘he *must* say at once’; he was making a ‘dying declaration’. The three principal *Letters on a Regicide Peace* are written in a tone of which the sobriety and the gravity are only occasionally heightened

by passages of impassioned declamation, or marred by outbursts of white-hot invective. As Burke's best commentator points out, these letters resemble, in general treatment of their subject, the American speeches.¹ The first *Letter on a Regicide Peace* especially forms a fitting pendant to the speech on *Conciliation with America*, and between them they provide, in a moderate compass, a fair sample of what is best and most characteristic in their author. The topic of the one is peace, recommended with the closest reasoning and the most persuasive moderation, and in a manner which raises the circumstances of a fugitive occasion into the plane of universal applicability. The topic of the other is war, and besides the consideration that very few wars seem to have been worth while after they have taken place, there is the further consideration that, as we have seen, Burke was mistaken in urging this war for the particular reasons which he adduced. However, he urges it with a depth of thought, a literary power, and a variety of illustration which he never surpassed, and which suffice to invest this letter also with a lasting significance.

The nature of a state, the conception of Europe as one great commonwealth, the circumstances which justify a European state in intervening in the internal affairs of another, the motives which have urged and should urge England to war, are some of the considerations in the light of which Burke envisages the situation before him. As he drew nearer to his end there was borne in upon him a deepening sense of something mysterious in the forces which govern the rise and fall of nations, of the mystery latent in the nature of

¹ Payne, Introduction to the *Letters*, p. 50.

society itself. States do not, he reflects, grow and die as do physical bodies ; biological analogies are insufficient, he says in effect, to explain what is a unique phenomenon. ‘ Commonwealths are not physical but moral essences ’, and, in their growth, are amenable to laws not yet ascertained nor perhaps ascertainable. He thus explodes by anticipation the fallacies lurking beneath the metaphor of ‘ the social organism ’, and much also of what in the early and middle years of the succeeding century passed under the name of the ‘ philosophy of history ’. The causes of the rise and fall of states can be explained only by historical investigation, and that is incomplete, and probably always will be. Great vicissitudes have occurred which seem to be assignable to no regularly operative causes ; ‘ a common soldier, a child, a girl at the door of an inn,¹ have changed the face of fortune, and almost of Nature ’.

In one of his great passages of historical retrospect, a passage from which we have quoted in a previous chapter, he considers this war in comparison with other wars in which England has been engaged. No war, he thinks, was ever the result of popular desire,² except the Spanish war of 1739, into which Walpole was urged against his better judgement, and that was a ‘ war of plunder ’. It was also a war which, as was subsequently allowed even by its promoters, ought never to have been undertaken. In the war of the

¹ Joan of Arc.

² He seems, in his later years, to have regarded the American war also as a ‘ popular ’ war in this sense, see *Collected Speeches*, iii. 484, on Flood’s Reform motion of 1790. In this connection he points out that a democratic state may be as warlike as any other form of state.

Grand Alliance, on the other hand, England was in her rightful place at the head of a European combination for the preservation of European freedom ; it was a war which was waged with resources infinitely less than those now at the disposal of the country ; a war to which the impulse was given from above ; a war which was sustained by the unconquerable resolution of William III. So it should have been with this war. ' This force of character was inspired, as all such spirit must ever be, from above. Government gave the impulse. As well may we fancy that of itself the sea will swell, and that without winds the billows will insult the adverse shore, or that the gross mass of the people will be moved, and elevated, and continue by a steady and permanent direction to bear upon one point, without the influence of superior authority or superior mind.'

France was not only ' brutalised ' by Jacobinism, but was thereby outlawed from the commonwealth of European nations. In virtue of common historic origins this commonwealth was virtually one great state, possessing with whatever local diversity, the same basis of general law. It was a community which, in its modes of intercourse and the whole fashion of its life, was such that ' no citizen of Europe could be altogether a stranger in any part of it '. It was not treaties, it was rather a ' secret, unseen but irrefragable band of intercourse ' which held Europe together. By the Law of Vicinage—Burke explains its origin and applicability—which was valid in the international as well as the civil sphere, interference was justified in the case of the new France, which had become an intolerable nuisance to her neighbours. Nor was

France, in the true conception of the term, a nation any longer: she was ‘out of herself’.

Near the end comes a touching personal reference. If the worst came to the worst, Burke would be found—‘he was going to say fighting—that would be absurd—but dying by the side of Mr. Pitt’.¹ Whatever might be the event, he would not blame the Ministry. They now included some of his oldest friends, except for one (meaning Fox) ‘whom these dim eyes in vain explore’.

At the end of 1796 Burke had a visitor at Beaconsfield who furnished one of the few reminiscences that we have of the last months of his life. Mackintosh (afterwards Sir James) was a perfected specimen of the bookman turned politician, and has had the fortune to be the subject of characteristic sketches by Hazlitt and Sidney Smith, and the occasion of an equally characteristic essay by Macaulay. In his youth—the conventional adjective would be inappropriate to one of so chilly a temperament—he had written what was esteemed to be the best defence of the Revolution against the *Reflections*. Since then, as he now informed Burke,² melancholy experience and more mature eyes had undeceived him on many subjects, including the French Revolution. Burke, in a letter of exceeding stateliness, invited him to Beaconsfield. Mr. Mackintosh’s very obliging letter was well calculated to stir up in Mr. Burke those remnants of vanity that he hoped had been nearly extinguished in a frame approaching to the dissolution of everything

¹ In *Burke and Windham Correspondence*, p. 179, there is a letter in which Burke places himself and his horses at the disposal of the government, and signed ‘E. Burke, or what remains of him and his’.

² Mackintosh’s *Memoirs* (1835), i. 87 sq.

that could feed that passion. Mr. Burke now never went out, and his infirmity, which left him but a few easy hours on his best days, would unfortunately prevent him from giving Mr. Mackintosh any of those attentions that were his due ; perhaps Mr. Mackintosh might come down with Dr. Laurence for company. Mackintosh, when he got to Beaconsfield, was astonished by his host, whom he found in a cheerful interval. His admiration led him to perpetrate an epigram which, though well known, has no basis in fact, viz. that Gibbon might have been cut out of a corner of Burke's mind without his missing it. We know, from other informants, that Burke was fond of playing with children in his last years, and Mackintosh found him thus occupied, 'rolling about with them on the carpet, and pouring out, in his gambols, the sublimest images mingled with the most wretched puns'. Death, Burke knew, could not be far off, and he was anticipating it 'with due solemnity but perfect composure'. Observation, however, does not seem to have been Mackintosh's strong point, he had, in Hazlitt's words, 'no more to say to a fact staring him in the face than to a hippopotamus'; and though he stayed at Beaconsfield for some days, his reminiscences are sadly imperfect. Of Fox Burke said with a deep sigh, 'he was made to be loved'; of Boswell's Johnson, that it was a greater monument to Johnson's fame than all his writings put together.

On politics, Burke reiterated his familiar convictions. Democracy he regarded as the worst of all governments. It was impossible at once to act and to control, consequently the sovereign power, in such a constitution, must be left without any check whatever.

He regarded that form of government as the best which placed the 'efficient sovereignty in the hands of the natural aristocracy of a country, subjecting them, in its exercise, to the control of the people at large'. On the French Revolution Burke's language in private evidently equalled—it would be impossible from the nature of the case to say surpassed—his language in public. He recited the 'sublime but nauseous' stanza of the *Faery Queen*, which describes the monster in the Cave of Error, a stanza which we need not follow the example of Mackintosh's biographer in suppressing. Spenser was a favourite poet of Burke's, who said on one occasion that 'whoever knew Spenser would have a strong hold on the English language'.

Therewith she spewed out of her filthy maw
 A flood of poison horrible and black,
 Full of great lumps of flesh and gobbets raw
 Which stank so vilely, that it forced him slack
 His grasping hold, and from her turn him back.
 With loathly frogs and toads, which eyes did lack
 And creeping sought way in the weedy grass
 Her filthy parbreak¹ all the place defiled has.

'You, Mr. Mackintosh', Burke added, 'are in vigorous manhood, your intellect is in its freshest prime, and you are a powerful writer. You shall be the faithful knight of romance; the brightness of your sword will flash destruction on the filthy progeny. . . . You, Mr. Mackintosh, knew my departed son well. . . . I could almost exclaim with Cornelia when she bewailed Pompey—you know that fine passage in Lucan—*Turpe mori, post te solo non posse dolore.*'²

¹ Vomit.

² 'It is a shameful thing that I cannot die after thee of grief alone.'

Burke's health was now getting daily worse. 'Michaelmas', he wrote, 'with all its riggs¹ is not more tempestuous than the Aeolian cave of my stomach.' At the beginning of the following year (1797) he was urged to try Bath again, having been there the previous year. The question was put to him bluntly of whether he desired to live. His answer is not recorded, but it appears that he shrank from the fatigue of the journey and from being stared at in a crowded Pump Room. However, he consented to go to 11 North Parade, Bath, and for the moment the place seemed to do him good. Though very weak, he does not seem to have been in great pain, and, whenever he could, he grappled with his self-imposed task. Large fragments of this, Burke's last work, were patched together not unskilfully by Laurence, and published after his death as the third *Letter on a Regicide Peace*.

Burke's native impetuosity, though not his intellectual vigour, was now subdued by sheer physical weakness; he was, moreover, urging his countrymen along a path which they had to take in any case. In this expiring effort we find, accordingly, more of statesmanlike coolness and less of prophetic ardour; it deals less in general topics than its predecessors, and more in the close discussion of facts. Lord Malmesbury, after a reception from the Directory such as has seldom been accorded an English ambassador, had returned unsuccessful. Nothing now remained but to prosecute the war as vigorously as possible. Burke set himself to show the futility of the negotiations for peace, to rouse the national spirit, and to prove that

¹ Gales

the resources of England were adequate to the great effort required. With an eye like that of the eagle—a telescope and a microscope at once—he surveys the field of English and European affairs. As regards England, one outstanding fact which proved her ability to maintain the struggle was the ease with which a loan of eighteen millions had been raised; nor was it anything against this loan that it was regarded by those who subscribed to it as a lucrative investment. ‘There must be some impulse besides public spirit to put private interest into motion along with it. Monied men ought to be allowed to set a value on their money; if they did not, there could be no monied men.’

All the sources of national wealth, almost every form of national activity, Burke examines. The spirit of the upper and the lower classes; the state of population and of wages; comparative figures, drawn from periods of peace and war, to show the state of the revenue; the yield from excise duties, from taxes on groceries, muslins, calicoes and printed goods; from licenses for vehicles, tea dealers, plate-sellers, hawkers and pedlars; the state of the Post Office; of field-sports and theatres; the report of the Inspector General; the condition of the Port of London—these matters are not merely, in a phrase which he applied to one of the reports with which he was concerned, ‘examined and sifted and bolted to the bran’, but often illustrated with comments of great interest. This business-like foundation supports two or three passages of superb declamation, as when, in a passage reminiscent of the opening lines of Henry V., he exhorts Pitt ‘to assume the port of Mars’, and, in allusion to Pitt’s colonial expeditions, ‘not to amuse the British lion with the

chase of rats and mice '. He dilates upon the qualities to be expected from the governing classes of the country at a great emergency :

The fortitude required of them . . . is not a passion ; it is a cool, steady, deliberate principle, always present, always equable, having no connexion with anger ; tempering honour with prudence ; incited, invigorated, and sustained, by a generous love of fame ; informed, moderated, and directed by an enlarged knowledge of its own great public ends ; flowing in one blended stream from the opposite sources of the heart and the head ; carrying in itself its own commission, and proving its title to every other command, by the first and most difficult command, that of the bosom in which it resides . it is a fortitude which unites with the courage of the field the more exalted and refined courage of the council , which knows as well to retreat as to advance ; which can conquer as well by delay as by the rapidity of a march, or the impetuosity of an attack ; which can be, with Fabius, the black cloud that lowers on the tops of the mountains, or with Scipio, the thunderbolt of war ; which, undismayed by false shame, can patiently endure the severest trial that a gallant spirit can undergo, in the taunts and provocations of the enemy, the suspicions, the cold respect, and ' mouth-honour ' of those from whom it should meet a cheerful obedience , which, undisturbed by false humanity, can calmly assume that most awful moral responsibility of deciding, when victory may be too dearly purchased by the loss of a single life, and when the safety and glory of their country may demand the certain sacrifice of thousands.¹

This large and reasoned appeal did not, however, reach the country at the time when it was especially needed. Austria had made peace, and England seemed likely to have to bear the brunt of the war alone. Napoleon was overrunning Italy, and even the victory of Cape St. Vincent did little to alleviate the general

¹ *Works*, v 323.

anxiety. The Bank of England stopped money payments. To crown all, there came the terrible months of April and May 1797, when first the fleet at Spithead, and then the fleet at the Nore, mutinied. Burke meanwhile lay at Bath, dying by inches. 'The ruling passion strong in death', he was kept in close touch with events by Windham, now Secretary at War, and by others.

Heard of the Portsmouth mutiny [wrote Wilberforce under date April 17th] consultation with Burke. . . . The whole scene is now before me. Burke was lying on a sofa much emaciated, and Windham, Laurence and some other friends were around him. The attention shown to Burke by all that party was just like the treatment of Ahitophel of old; it was as if one went to inquire of the oracle of the Lord.

But even the minimum of bodily strength for which it craved was about to fail an unconquerable mind. It was clear that Bath could do nothing more for Burke, and he did not wish to die away from home. To Beaconsfield he was accordingly removed.

There he lingered for some weeks, and lived to hear that the mutiny had been quelled. Fox, on learning that the end was near, sent a letter of inquiry. Burke replied to the effect that the severance of their long friendship had caused him the most heartfelt pain, but that the principles which had separated them ranked before individual interests, and could only be enforced by the example of an absolute sincerity. It was on a scene of the gloomiest apprehension, from which, however, the blackest cloud had just lifted, that Burke's dying gaze was turned. Retaining consciousness to the end, he expired peacefully on July 9,

1797. 'There is only one piece of news', wrote Canning, 'but that is news for the world, Burke is dead.' Fox was the first to propose that he should be buried in Westminster Abbey, but it was found that Burke's own directions forbade. He was buried in the grave which had already received his son and was, fifteen years later, to receive his wife. Nor was it unfitting that he should have found his last resting-place in the church of the typical English country town which had been his home for so long, and from which the vast circle of his interests and affections had radiated.

Burke's character has, it is hoped, been displayed in the foregoing pages in such a manner as to render subsequent comment unnecessary; it stands, by general consent, as high as a predominant purity of motive and unselfishness of aim can place it. A harsh intolerance, it must be owned, grew upon his last years; and the outbursts of irritability and petulance to which he was always more or less liable show that his nervous constitution was unequal to the incessant strain to which it was subjected. But traits such as these, though displayed more frequently than his admirers could altogether wish, are certainly not sufficient to taint the core of an essentially warm-hearted and high-principled man. Such things were, at least in part, the penalty which he paid for feelings that were abnormally acute, for a spirit that dilated to the greatness of the causes it embraced, for much of what was, in words that a poet has applied to him,

stormy pity, and the cherished lure
Of pomp, and proud precipitance of soul.

It is not, however, in respect of character as distinct

from intellect that Burke stands out from an age singularly fruitful in great personalities. He did not impress himself on his generation in the masterful manner of Johnson. Nor do we feel, when in his presence, that we are dominated as we are by Chatham, or charmed as we are by Fox. Nor, again, are we fascinated, as we are in some other men of Burke's magnitude, by a sense of mystery, of some unsolved enigma of motive or outlook, the general tendency of his mind, the directions in which he applied his immense reserves of intellectual and emotional force, seem sufficiently unambiguous and intelligible. None the less we feel that in Burke we have to do with a man who was great every way—great in his loves and his hates, in his ideals, his purposes and his energy.

Hazlitt, the justice and the zest of whose criticism was never affected by Burke's identification with causes that he himself hated, says that the only adequate specimen of Burke's powers is 'all that he wrote'. This, if taken literally, is a hard saying. But it is certainly true, and it is of course what Hazlitt meant, that even the least attractive of Burke's pieces bear his stamp upon them, and are almost invariably redeemed from the deadness of superannuated political controversy by some characteristic flash of thought or felicity of expression. It is true also that a large portion of the volumes which he has left us must always retain the importance of a commentary on a decisive period of English history from a contemporary and a master mind. However, and for purposes less austere than those of the professional historian, one must make distinctions. Large tracts of Burke's writings, including such an intrinsic masterpiece as

the speech on the *Nabob of Arcot's debts*, are hopelessly weighted with an obsolete subject-matter. The concluding portion of the *Thoughts on the present Discontents*, the speech on *Conciliation with America*, the more general portions of the speech on the *East India Bill*, and the middle portion of the *Reflections on the French Revolution* may be said to mark the chief phases of Burke's activity and thought. This selection will show what is most characteristic in him, the radiant energy of his style, the grand generalisations which he evokes from what is always a concrete foundation, the imaginative illumination which he throws on topics of government or policy. But it will afford an inadequate illustration of the whole range of his powers, and, more especially, of his mastery of those more common qualities which constitute the excellence of a report or a state paper. He is not generally remarkable for sustained processes of reasoning; his mind was of a different order. None the less he can, when occasion arises, argue closely and concisely upon facts in a manner that renders his official or semi-official writings models of their kind; but the very appreciable proportion of his works which is of this character is necessarily condemned to oblivion.

His avocations being what they were, Burke never, after his powers had reached maturity, attempted to write a systematic treatise on politics or on anything else. With an appetite for facts, a strong interest in the detailed working of institutions, and the 'retrospective imagination', which is said to be a characteristic of his nation, he would almost certainly, had his circumstances been different, have followed the path of Gibbon rather than that of Hume. For good and

for evil, his practical policy was that of one who invariably started from actual institutions, and, though without any sentimental preoccupation with the past as such, was always conscious of the past in the present. He firmly believed that human nature rebelled against attempts to secure social or economic equality, and that it also demanded from society and government a certain exterior pageantry. The gusts of passion and prejudice which disturbed and in part vitiated his outlook on India and on France sprang, not from the rage of the fanatic who finds himself in collision with facts, but from hatred of any policy which aimed at destroying native growths, or at imposing a mechanical uniformity on a natural variety of institution and custom.

Wonderful as are the uses to which Burke has put the English language, the purely literary quality of his writings is necessarily injured by their origin and their subject-matter. In this field he won his triumphs over the most recalcitrant materials. His immersion in the practice of politics also affected, though this is a comparatively small matter, the technical consistency of his thinking. But it cannot be doubted that he gained far more than he lost by 'giving up to party what was meant for mankind'; he gained the close knowledge of all the business of government, the practical acquaintance with all the types of men engaged in its working, which gives his writings their peculiar virtue. Their uniqueness consists in illustrating, by means of concrete examples, the ideas which must underlie and the motives which must animate any form of political association, and especially one at all resembling the English form which he

idealised. Treatises on political philosophy exist in relative abundance, but in Burke we find a political philosophy in action, and employing for its service an intellect which appraises and an imagination which vivifies a long series of actual situations. We find this philosophy wielding a style which reflects a spirit capable of the noblest enthusiasm and the noblest anger, of a withering scorn and an infinite pity; a style which is reminiscent by turns of the study, the deliberative assembly, and the common life of the streets and the fields; a style which, in particular, cannot easily be surpassed for effects of sheer strength. 'Forked and playful is the lightning, crested like the serpent', its essential individuality baffles even Hazlitt's descriptive powers, and Hazlitt's avowal does not encourage subsequent attempts.

Never losing himself in the void, but wrestling with situation after situation, and drawing, like Antaeus, ever fresh strength from the solid earth, Burke displays qualities which, to quote Hazlitt again, 'contradict even themselves.' Rhetoric and science are natural enemies. Yet one of Burke's most striking characteristics is the manner in which he combines the qualities of the rhetorician with much of the standpoint of the modern sociologist. His dislike of 'metaphysical' abstractions was united, in a degree highly unusual, with a firm allegiance to reason, and with something much the reverse of empiricism. He may be called a pioneer in the manner in which he insisted, by precept and more especially by example, that State and Empire needed expert knowledge for their service. His knowledge of the facts bearing on the national life of Great Britain and her dependencies was immense.

His immeasurable superiority in this respect to any other contemporary statesman is one of those things about him which, just because it is largely illustrated by writings which have necessarily become obsolete, is not always fully realised, and it was an original thing in an age which attached a disproportionate importance to oratory in the equipment of a statesman. In historical outlook, again, and in the illustration which he provides of the subtle and manifold influences exerted by custom and association over human nature in politics, he speaks more directly to us than he did to his contemporaries. So much at least may be claimed for one who cannot, in some obvious and important aspects, be said to have shown himself in advance of the best thought of his time.

To us, indeed, who survey it from the vantage ground afforded by subsequent history, Burke's career presents a stranger paradox than any of which he himself or his contemporaries could have been conscious. We see an almost unexampled combination of powers dedicated, not to preparing the way along which England and France were to travel during the century succeeding his death, but to supporting a political and a social order which, even before his own eyes, was beginning to pass away. Burke cannot, on any reasonable estimate, avoid incurring a measure of the reproach attaching to those who look behind. Even if his greatest work had not been elicited by an emergency which seemed to imperil most of what he valued in society, it is safe to say that, with an unspeculative mind and a conservative temperament, he would not have turned political thought and practice into fresh channels. His diagnosis of the

master tendencies latent in the events of his later years was admittedly inadequate from lack of sympathy. But this inadequacy did not narrow his panoramic vision of the nature and the constituents of a civilised social order. Nor are the elements of validity and permanence which his philosophy contains, still less the force and the beauty of their expression, affected by his static conception of the institutions of his age and country.

Much, no doubt, of Burke's message is bound, if translated out of the form impressed upon it by his own mind and style, to savour of the commonplace. But it is the prerogative of great literature to give an ever new life to the commonplaces of our existence, the most vivid experiences, the deepest emotions of humanity remain commonplaces until they have been touched and transformed by the imagination of the poet. Burke was not a poet; yet in his own sober province he attains, and not infrequently, to what resembles a poet's achievement. He had something, not only of the poet's imagination, but of the poet's wonder, however unusual may have been the sphere in which these gifts were displayed. His wonder at the 'mysterious incorporation of the human race' was never dulled by a long familiarity; nor was his sense of what he more than once calls the beauty of an ordered state extinguished by the dust and heat of the arena in which his lot was cast. It is this sense which we feel beneath many of his utterances which express the commonplaces of human government in the grandest form, and lend them a new significance.

INDEX

Abridgement of English History,
13-14, 162 n

America, Conciliation with,
speech on. See *Conciliation*
America, Account of European
Settlements in, 40 n

American Taxation, speech on,
72, 98-9, 187 n

Appeal from New to Old Whigs,
63, 251 sq

Arcot, Nabob of, 159-60

Army Estimates of 1790, speech
on, 206, 231

Arnold, Matthew, 268 n, 288

Articles of Charge against Warren
Hastings, 170

Auckland, Lord, 321-2

Bacon, 226

Bagehot, Walter, 63-4, 79, 264

Barré, Colonel, 144

Barry, 83

Barwell, 146

Bathurst, Lord, 101

Beauclerk, Topham, 87

Bedford, fourth Duke of, 39

Bedford, fifth Duke of, 307-8,
311-13, 314-17

Benfield, Paul, 165

Birrell, Mr Augustine, 82 n, 94

Bolingbroke, Viscount, 12, 21,
47, 67

Boswell, James, 92

Boswell's Life of Johnson, 90-91,
330

Bristol, Speech at, previous to
Election, 121 sq.

Brocklesby, Dr, 83, 302-3

Burdett, Sir Francis, 74

Burke, Edmund, birth and
parentage, 1-3, schooldays
at Ballitore, 3-5, enters
Trinity College, Dublin, 5,
leaves Ireland, 6, marries,
8, obtains engagement on
Annual Register, 10, early
works, 11-14, connection
with Gerard Hamilton, 14-
19, private secretary to
Rockingham, 20, 34, enters
Parliament, 39, speeches on
Stamp Act, 44; relations to
Rockingham party, 46 sq.,
opinions on Wilkes affair, 54-
55, early opposition to Fox,
56, attitude to various political
questions of time, 56-8;
publishes *Thoughts on Present*
Discontents, 62 sq., earlier
position in House of Com-
mons, 72 sq; purchase of
Beaconsfield estate, 81 sq.,
relations with Johnson, 86 sq.;
kindness to Ciabbe, 93, ap-
pointed paid agent to colony
of New York, 96, speech on
American Taxation, 98, on
Conciliation with America,
100 sq.; elected for Bristol,
105; third important speech
on America, 107; publishes
Letter to Sheriff of Bristol,
108; relations with North,
111, Economical Reform

proposals, and speech thereon, 112 sq., horror at Gordon Riots, 117; attitude to Parliamentary Reform, 118 sq., speech at *Bristol, previous to Election*, 121 sq., loses seat for Bristol, elected for Malton, 123, Paymaster of Forces in second Rockingham administration, 126, and in Coalition Government, 129, earlier feelings towards Pitt, 132-3, affair of Powell and Bembridge, 134-5, loses popularity from 1784, 134, review of first stage of his political career, 136 sq., earliest attitude towards India, 143-4, change in this respect from about 1780, association with Francis begins, 147 sq., indignation against Warren Hastings, 151, speech on Fox's *East India Bill*, 153 sq., on *Nabob of Arcot's debts*, 159 sq., produces charges against Warren Hastings, 169; impeaches Warren Hastings before Lords, 173, opening speech in the impeachment, 182 sq., 'Bribery and Corruption' speech, its violence, 194, censured by House of Commons, 197; attacked in press, 198, reputation injured by Regency Bill debates, 202, his reputation at its lowest about 1789, 203; cautious attitude towards beginnings of French Revolution, 205, rapid change of feeling, *ib.*, publication of *Reflections on French Revolution*, 307; some characteristics of Burke as therein revealed, 208 sq., its success, 230, change in Burke's position, *ib.*; begins to differ from Fox, 231; breaks with Sheridan, 232;

speech on *Unitarians*, 233, rupture with Fox in House of Commons, 235 sq., between two parties, 239, question of his consistency, in light of his underlying principles, 242 sq., *Appeal from New to Old Whigs*, 251 sq.; intense hatred of French Revolution henceforth, 255, yet tempered at this time by moments of doubt, 256, exertions on behalf of émigrés, 265, despatches his son on mission to French Royalists at Coblenz, 266, attitude to Ireland, 267 sq., hatred of Protestant Ascendancy, 268, always reformer as to Ireland, 269, *First Letter to Sir H Langrishe*, 271, opinion on Maynooth foundation, 273, opinions as to war with France, 275 sq., 284 sq.; joins Government, 281, 'Dagger scene', 282, fears aggrandising aims of Allies against France, 288, unbecoming language especially in later stages of Warren Hastings' Impeachment, 290; Report on the Impeachment, 292, final speech in Impeachment, 293; indirect effect of Burke's efforts, 298, letter to Laurence on subject, 299, retires from Parliament, 301, proposal to make him a peer, subsequently abandoned, 302, death of his son, 303; his overwhelming grief, *ib.*, grant of pension, 304-5, his pension attacked by Duke of Bedford and Earl of Lauderdale, 307; *Letter to a Noble Lord*, 308 sq., some notes of his style, *ib.*, last phase, 321 sq.; *Letters on a Regicidal Peace*, 322 sq.; visited at Beaconsfield by

- Mackintosh, 329 *sq* ; goes to Bath, 332, *Thurd Letter on Regicide Peale*, *ib* , last message to Fox, 335, death at Beaconsfield, 336 ; some of his main characteristics, 336 *sq*
 Burke, Mrs Edmund, 9, 94, 200, 258
 Burke, Garrett, 1
 Burke, Richard (Burke's father), 1, 7
 Burke, Richard (Burke's brother), 1, 9, 10, 87 *n* , 259-61, 266, 271
 Burke, Richard (Burke's son), 68, 180, 258, 260, 301-3, 306
 Burke, William, 9, 10, 39, 40 *n* , 127, 147, 175, 259
 Burney, D1, 87
 Burney, Fanny, 9, 179-81, 190, 193, 260, 265
 Bute, 33
 Butler, Charles, 135 *n* .
 Byron, 93, 142
 Canning, 336
 Carlyle, 108
 Cartelet, 21
 Chamier, 87
 Charlotte, Queen, 179, 200
 Chatham, Earl of, 21, 23, 34, 37, 45, 48, 49, 50, 59, 100, 111
 Chesterfield, Lord, 21
 Cheyt Singh, 147, 172, 195
 Cicero, 29, 158, 325
 Clarence, Duke of, 201
 Clavering, General, 145-6
 Clive, Lord, 142-3, 169
 Coleridge, S. T., 7, 79, 91, 133, 248-9
Conciliation with America, speech on, 43, 100 *sq* , 326, 338
 Coote, Sir Eyre, 128, 147, 173
 Cornwallis, Lord, 125, 171, 175 *n* .
 Cowper, William, 186
 Crabbe, George, 83, 93, 263
 Crewe, Mrs., 259-261
 Cruger, 106
 Cumberland, Duke of, 33, 70
 Dallas, 174, 291
 D'Arblay, Madame *See* Burney, Fanny
 Dashwood, Sir F., 20
 Debi Singh, 185
 Dilke, C W., 82 *n*
Discontents, Thoughts on Present, 63 *sq* , 103, 243, 247, 338
 Disraeli, 165
 Dodd, Dr., 27
 Dundas, 149, 166-7, 175 *n* ., 266-7
 Dupont, 205
East India Bill, speech on, 153 *sq* , 338
Economical Reform, speech on, 72, 73 *n* , 112 *sq*
 Eden, 115
 Elliott, Sir Gilbert (Lord Minto), 74, 88, 136, 143 *n* ., 173-4, 201, 240, 259
 Erskine, 75 *n* , 230, 167, 174
 Fitz Gerald, Edward, 93
 Fitzwilliam, Earl, 128, 272, 301
 Flood, 22, 327 *n*
 Fox, Charles James, 7, 21, 25 *n* ., 26, 31, 55 *sq* ., 69 *sq* ., 83, 125-126, 129, 131-4, 152, 157-8, 171, 174-5, 179, 196, 199, 200, 205, 231 *sq* , 242, 260, 277 *sq* ., 292, 335, 336-7
 Francis, (Sir) Philip, 9, 116, 145-9, 150-1, 167, 174-6, 179, 195 *n* ., 240, 261, 263, 293
 French, Mary, 259-60
French Affairs, Thoughts on, 296 *n* ., 266 *n* .
French Revolution, Reflections on, 17, 210 *sq* ., 228, 233, 236 *n* ., 245, 246 *n* , 252, 311, 338

Garrick, David, 16, 259, 387
 Genlis, Madame de, 265
 George III, 13, 24, 32-3, 36,
 38, 45, 48, 50, 53, 58, 59, 64,
 67, 99, 117, 125, 129, 168,
 172, 199, 203, 228, 321
 Gibbon, Edward, 115, 135 n.,
 224, 330
 Gilfillan, 91
 Gillray, 158 n, 283 n.
 Gladstone, W E, 23
 Gloucester, Duke of, 70
 Goldsmith, Oliver, 72, 90, 92,
 259
 Grafton, Duke of, 34, 39, 48-
 50, 58
 Grattan, Henry, 22
 Grenville, George, 33, 42-3,
 48, 98, 187, 204 n
 Grenville, Lord, 283, 307
 Grey, Earl, 174, 321
 Hamilton, William Gerard, 14-
 15, 17-19, 89
 Hastings, Warren, 142, 144-7,
 151, 156, 168-9, 170-1, 173-
 177, 178 sq, 196, 197-8, 207,
 232, 290-1, 293-8. See *Im-
 peachment of*
 Hawkins, Sir John, 8, 87
 Hazlitt, William, 74, 161, 308,
 315 n., 330, 337, 340
 Henry IV of France, 157,
 158 n
 Hesketh, Lady, 186
 Howard, John, 123
 Hume, David, 13, 68, 330
 Hussey, Dr, 273
 Hyder Ali, 149, 162, 173

Impeachment of Warren Hastings,
 Burke's opening speech in,
 182 sq., second speech in,
 193-4; third speech in, 393-
 395

Impey, Sir Elijah, 197

James, Henry, 193
 Jenyns, Soame, 115
 Joan of Arc, 327 n.

Johnson, Samuel, 12, 15, 16,
 20-1, 26-7, 29, 72, 77-8,
 88 sq, 92, 99, 115, 250, 259,
 262, 337
 Junius (*Letters of Junius*), 49,
 53, 57, 85, 145, 308

Keppel, Admiral Lord, 317

*Langrishe, Sir Hercules, first
 letter to*, 119 n, 271
 Langton, Bennett, 87, 90
 Lauderdale, Earl of, 307
 Laurence, Dr French, 136,
 195 n, 299, 303, 332, 335
 Law, Edward (Lord Ellen-
 borough), 174, 185, 290-2
 Leadbeater, Mary, 4
Leadbeater Papers, 4
*Letter to a Member of the
 National Assembly*, 229
Letter to a Noble Lord, 121, 293,
 308, 317 sq
 Liverpool, Lord, 135
 Locke, 41
 Loughborough, Lord Chancel-
 lor, 296
 Louis XVI, 205, 213, 228
 Lucan, 29, 331
 Lucas, Charles, 5

Macartney, Lord, 162 n.
 Macaulay, Lord, 37, 56, 80,
 113, 146, 162 n, 178-9, 194,
 198, 231, 278 n, 308-9
 Mackintosh, Sir James, 329-
 331
 Macknight, T, 84 n, 107,
 145 n, 197 n, 278, 282 n.
 Malmesbury, Lord, 332
 Marie Antoinette, 14, 212
 Markham, Dr. William, 14, 46,
 85, 180
 Milton, 11
 Mirabeau, 205
 Monson, Colonel, 145-6
 Montesquieu, 11, 28, 62-3,
 214 n, 217 n
 Moore, Thomas, 175
 More, Hannah, 9

More, Sir Thomas, 226
 Morley, Lord, 82 *n*, 246 *n*,
 248, 251 *n*, 293, 325

Nabob of Arcot's Debts, speech
 on, 75, 77 *n*, 79 *n*, 160 *sq*,
 • 338

Napoleon, 288, 334

Newcastle, Duke of, 33-4

Newman, Cardinal, 93, 309

Noble Lord, Letter to a See
Letter to, etc

North, Lord, 25-7, 38, 58, 82,
 98, 100, 102, 107, 111, 117,
 125-6, 131, 138, 144, 149

Nugent, Dr, 8, 87

Nugent, Jane See Burke, Mrs

Nuncomar, 147, 197

*Observations on Conduct of
 Minority*, 281

Observations on State of Nation,
 63-4

Paine, Tom, 222

Palmer, Miss, 262

Parsons, Nancy, 39

Payne, Mr. E. J., 207 *n*, 326 *n*

Pichegru, 321

Pigott, Lord, 148

Piozzi, Mrs, 87 *n*

Pitt, William, the elder See
 Chatham, Earl of

Pitt, William, the younger, 7,
 21-2, 24, 27, 31, 67, 83, 124,
 131-4, 137-8, 146, 152, 160-
 161, 167, 172, 174-5, 199,
 200-3, 228, 260, 266-7, 272,
 275, 277, 279-81, 284, 286-7,
 304-7, 321, 329, 333

Plato, 226

Plumer, 174, 291-2

Porson, Richard, 73

Portland, third Duke of, 35,
 200, 281

Price, Dr. Richard, 158 *n*, 206,
 208, 210-12, 218, 247, 257

Prior, Sir James, 203 *n*, 305 *n*

Pulteney, 21

Quincey, Thomas de, 314 *n*

Reflections on French Revolution
 See *French Revolution*

Regicide Peace, Letters on, 275,
First Letter on, 324-9;
Second, 324, *Third*, 332-4,
Fourth, 322-3

Remarks on Policy of Allies,
 287-90

Report on Warren Hastings'
Trial, 183 *n*, 292

Reynolds, Sir J, 46, 83, 87,
 166 *n*, 240

Richmond, Duke of, 34, 116,
 85-6, 145, 309

Rigby, 37, 127

Rockingham, Marquis of, 20,
 32-3, 38, 45-6, 52, 82, 84,
 92, 105, 127, 128-9, 158, 309

Rodney, Admiral, 124, 128

Rose, Dr J Holland, 265

Rousseau, 225, 229

Sacheverell, impeachment of,
 251

St Just, 146

Samuels, Mr A. P I, 5

Sandwich, Lord, 37, 39, 51

Sayer, 158

Scarcity, Thoughts on, 264, 300

Scott, Major, 169, 185 *n*, 197-9

Scott, Sir Walter, 93, 155 *n*

Shackleton, Richard, 2, 3, 81

Sheffield, Lord, 134

Shelburne, Earl of, 129-30,
 125-6

Shelley, 210

Sheridan, 22, 76, 83, 129, 172-
 174, 179, 186 *n*, 192-3, 197,
 232-3, 291, 297

Sheridan, Mrs., 185

Sheriffs of Bristol, letter to, 108-9

Sichel, Mr Walter, 26, 203 *n*.

Simpkin's Letters, 74 *n*, 198

Smith, Adam, 47, 59, 132

Smith, Sidney, 85

Smollett, 13

Spenser, 331

Stanhope, Lord, 202, 302

Stanislaus of Poland, King,
228

Stephen, Sir James, 195 *n*

Strafford, 183

Sublime and Beautiful, 11-12,
309

Swift, 78, 152, 219

Tacitus, 31

Tallien, 322

Tanjore, Rajah of, 159

Taxation no Tyranny, 99-100

Thoughts on Discontents See
Discontents

Thurlow, Lord Chancellor, 79,
200, 296

Tone, Wolfe, 271-2

Tooke, Horne, 70

Townshend, Charles, 21, 29 *n*,
48-9, 98, 187 *n*.

Tucker, Dean, 43

Unitarians, speech on, 233

Verney, Lord, 39, 82 *n*., 105

Vindication of Natural Society,
12, 49 *n*., 223 *n*., 309

Virgil, 11, 29

Voltaire, 28, 152, 324

Wales, Prince of (George IV),
84, 199-200, 201, 228

Walpole, Horace, 15, 69, 111,
212 *n*

Walpole, Sir Robert, 327

Warton, Joseph, 18

Wells, Mr H G, 35

West, Benjamin, 8

Weymouth, Lord, 39

Wilberforce, William, 335

Wilkes, John, 38-9, 50-55, 58,
67, 78, 200

William III, 328

Windham, William, 130, 174,
179, 181, 190, 240, 302 *n* ,

307, 335

Woffington, Peg, 8

Wordsworth, 7, 204

Wraxall, Sir N, 87, 204

York, Duke of, 201, 321

Young, Arthur, 94

Zisca, John, 312

